DOCTORATE IN PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

GROWING WORK BASED LEARNING IN EUROPE

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SUMMARY

This doctoral project is a case study of how work based learning began to grow in Europe through the conceptualisation and development of a common European work based learning platform in a pan-European partnership. The partnership, known as DEWBLAM (Developing European Work Based Learning Approaches and Methods), was established in order to introduce higher education institutions to work based learning, enabling them to pilot their own programmes relevant to local needs and situations. The project was framed within European protocols, such as the Bologna Process that aims to modernise and transform different national higher education systems into a transparent and comparable European system.

The methodological approach is interpretative and constructivist, enabling me to theorise the how and why of events, and allowing theories to emerge from the data. I use an explanatory case study, which is retrospective as the DEWBLAM project has ended and no further intervention is possible, test validity through action research indicators, and draw relatable inferences.

I analyse the multi-layered ecology of the DEWBLAM project, identifying how changing postmodern epistemologies and internal/external environments affected the partnership, highlighting the need to establish a meta-narrative and drawing on my previous professional practice to support my role in facilitating the processes of knowledge creation. I then critically analyse the definitions and distinctive features of work based learning that were collectively conceptualised, referencing these within current thinking, and raising concerns at these definitions as job-related competences.

I consider the case for meshing academic and work based knowledge with competence to form the concept of *competent knowledge* and analyse the bounded relationships of universities and the work place, proposing new ways of engagement that allow multi-directional knowledge flows.

Finally, I give an overview of the doctoral project outcomes, evaluate the potential impact of DEWBLAM, highlighting the contribution to knowledge and local knowledge economies made by the platform and the ensuing pilot programmes. I reflect on my achievements and on my own practice, and conclude by recommending that, *inter alia,* the expert practitioners at Middlesex University need to contribute more to informing current debates on new European educational realities, in order to avoid the prevalence of too narrow interpretations of work based learning.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Project context

The concept of work based learning (wbl) is only now slowly starting to become part of European higher education discourse and practice. It is often highly contested and resisted by regional polities and by academic institutions and their practitioners, despite major changes that are occurring at national levels through the implementation of the Bologna Process[1] that aims to establish comparability and transparency of national higher educational frameworks within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. Although no direct reference was made to work based learning methodologies, the Bologna Declaration of 1999 stated that credits should be obtainable in non-HE contexts such as lifelong learning, thereby opening accreditation and work based opportunities. The Bergen Communiqué (May, 2005), issued by the European Ministers for Higher Education, stated that progress was sought in developing flexible learning paths, including procedures for the recognition of prior learning and, where possible, non-formal and informal learning that would both enable access to and be elements of higher education programmes. More recently, the London Communiqué (May, 2007) implicitly referenced wbl by urging further development of curriculum innovation in partnership with employers.

Whilst on the one hand, national legal frameworks for modernising higher education are being, or have been, introduced across Europe, concomitantly there remains a significant gap between the realities of legislative and institutional implementation. According to the European Universities Association (EUA) in its recent appraisal[2] of the state of play presented to the ministerial summit in May 2007, the majority of institutions support concepts of lifelong learning, but the implementation into mainstream provision is complex and still marginal in strategic institutional development.

In the UK, higher education institutions (HEIs) remain independent and in ownership of their awards, but in the NARIC National Action Plan for Recognition of overseas qualifications[3], HEIs have expressed concerns over some elements of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) that has been embraced across Europe as the credit standard and will be implemented by 2010. These concerns have been referred to the European Commission and an ECTS review has commenced in 2007. Both this report and the UK National Report[4] on the Bologna Process (2005-2007), however, focus mainly on undergraduate students attending universities, with minimal reference to employed adult work based learning programmes despite their increasing availability across the UK.

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[1] See www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna for further information on the Bologna Process and for the Bergen 2005 and London 2007 Ministerial communiqués

[2] Trends V report - see www.eua.be for further information

[3] National Recognition Information Centre – recent undated report on DFES Bologna website

[4] Report on DFES Bologna website

Within this envelope of European protocols and agreements, of national legislative frameworks, and of regional and institutional implementation and resistances, lies the collaborative project I initiated in 2001. Over a two year-period – supported by a bid from Middlesex University's Academic Initiatives Fund - I presented the wbl models used by Middlesex University and those I developed specifically for the SME[5] sector to HE institutions in Italy, Germany and Belgium. These were received with interest and also scepticism on the part of some academics who thought that wbl programmes did not constitute university-level education. The initial link with Italy had come about through prior contacts with the Middlesex International Office, and links with Germany were made through Italy – during my first visit to Germany, the prospective Belgian partner attended my presentation and invited me to visit Limburg. I carefully nurtured these crucial early contacts with institutional high-level executives and employers'/employees' organisations – visiting several times and hosting a return visit - and was thus able to influence their decisions to participate in a partnership that could potentially cause fundamental changes to their educational systems. The three partner representatives already had experience in European projects such as developing credit transfer systems, so were well positioned to understand the potential significance of work based learning.

In 2003, after I had made two unsuccessful applications on behalf of Middlesex University to the European Union for funds - turned down by the British Socrates fund evaluators as being yet another training project - I considered that the proposal to implement work based learning across Europe was too significant to be allowed to fail. Therefore, I persuaded Middlesex University to take the political decision to request the University of Florence, as a southern European institution, to act as project coordinator, which they agreed to do on the basis that they needed to implement work based learning as part of new European lifelong learning initiatives. This bid was successful, and the DEWBLAM (Developing Work Based Learning Approaches and Methods) partnership was founded and supported through the European Union Socrates Grundtvig fund with the aim of developing a common work based learning platform and implementing differing pilot programmes specific to the single partner contexts[6].

The partnership was highly complex and diverse (see figure 1 below) - constituted firstly by Middlesex University and the Belgian, German and Italian partners, with the Czech, Finnish, French, and Spanish institutions[7] invited to join in order to have a mix of old/newer universities and the right political composition comprising all the parts of the Union, as demanded by European Union funding regimes. Southern European projects were also more likely at that time to gain funding, hence the decision to coordinate the project from Florence. Most were motivated to participate in the partnership because of the need to implement flexible learning as part of the Bologna Process, whilst Middlesex and Lille were keen to widen their networks and seek new business. The partnership was characterised by:

[5] Small and Medium Enterprise

[6] See appendix 1 for the summary of the project funded from 2003-2006

[7] Selected through the first partners' personal contacts

- being a partnership of mainly higher education institutions plus four private research or employers' organisations
- having individual, highly specific fields of operation, yet applying a collaborative and democratic approach
- operating within diverse cultural, linguistic, economic, and socio-political domains
- having a wide range of needs and pre-understanding of wbl
- being purposefully designed to create common knowledge of wbl and to apply variations relevant to the single higher education institutions

Figure 1 - Table of DEWBLAM members

COUNTRY	INSTITUTION	WBL EXPERIENCE	PARTNER JOB ROLE
Belgium	Katholieke Hogeschool, Limburg, and VIA	Some initial, gained by contact with Middlesex	Academic Practitioner
Czech Republic	Univerzita Karlova Praha	None	Academic
Finland	Abo Akademi, Abo	None	Administrative
France	Université des Sciences et Technologies de Lille	Considerable	Academic
Germany	Fachhochschule Aachen and Arbeitsamt	None	Administrative Administrative
Italy	Università di Firenze which headed the E-FORM consortium and Consorzio Servizi Formativi alle Imprese	None	Academic Practitioner
Spain	Universidad de Granada	None	Academic
Switzerland	Federazione Svizzera per la Formazione Continua	None	Administrative (Unfunded partner)
UK	Middlesex University and Quantum Partnership	Considerable	Academic Practitioner

Whilst the partners' pre-understanding of the theory and practice of work based learning was extremely limited or non-existent (apart from France and the UK), the Italian, Belgian, and German representatives respectively had acquired significant experience in ECTS, in the Tuning projects[8], and in promoting and implementing the Bologna Process. This facilitated their intellectual openness towards wbl discourse, added to the partnership knowledge base, and additionally helped to frame the DEWBLAM project within European protocols. However, the differences in role type (academic, organisational practitioner, or administrative with European project experience) and experiences, had an initial negative impact on the development of concepts and, ultimately, in the implementation of work based learning elements or programmes, necessitating frequent guidance workshops. A more coherent initial selection on the basis of academic/work sector and role may have helped to minimise some of the developmental problems that were experienced throughout this project.

The project focused in the first year on research into the existence of any national wbl practices and into the legal and institutional barriers and opportunities that might prevent or encourage wbl applications. In the second year, the common European wbl platform was drafted and developed, enabling the partners to initiate planning their pilot programmes. The final year focused on piloting the programmes and on the dissemination of findings to external audiences through local events and a final European conference and publication of papers.

Doctoral project aim

This doctoral project aims to analyse the collaborative *process* of developing a common European work based learning platform in the highly complex DEWBLAM partnership, and to scrutinise the ensuing *definitions* of work based learning.

For the purposes of this report, I begin with the definition of work based learning as *learning at, through, and for work*[9] that was used initially for writing the project bid, and trace the transformation this definition undergoes when confronted and challenged by emerging European understandings and practices[10].

To achieve this, I will firstly situate DEWBLAM in a postmodern context, then analyse the process, the platform definitions, the role of practice or work based knowledge, the relationships between work and universities, and finally, consider the impact that DEWBLAM might have on local knowledge and learning economies.

[8] Group of universities engaged in ongoing projects to identify convergences in educational structure and programmes – for an example, see: www.unideusto.org

[9] This definition has also been in common use at Middlesex University

[10] See chapter four

Doctoral project boundaries

This doctoral project is a study of the DEWBLAM partnership and its processes and outcomes. It is not a study of the detailed partner situations as they implemented wbl approaches with varying degrees of success, as these are neither within the scope of this doctoral project, nor are they my story to tell. However, for the purpose of clarification, and to provide a personal background contextualising my significant role in leading this innovation (as a knowledgeable partner through my consultancy, Quantum Partnership, and through representing Middlesex University), I will refer to relevant aspects of my own wbl pilot programme implementation and also to previous experiences emanating from my work on professional learning with the SME sector.

The DEWBLAM project is bounded in time (it ended in 2006), and my recent investigations into progress on pilot implementations reveal that Finland has since developed a credit based module for SME entrepreneurs, whilst the German academics still refuse to take ownership of the platform and develop work based programmes.

In order to distinguish between the two projects, I will hereafter refer to the *DEWBLAM project* and to my *doctoral project* as such.

Methodological approach

This doctoral project is presented as a *retrospective case study* of the partnership and of its processes. The partnership was constituted in order to research work based learning methodologies, to collaboratively develop a common work based platform, and to implement individual pilots that either contained elements or were full work based programmes. However, as the partnership had not deliberately designed, engaged in, nor referred to its work as action research, this research better fits a case study paradigm.

Relevance of this project to my doctoral programme and personal professional practice

The principal theme in my doctoral programme is that of creating knowledge within collaborative learning partnerships. In my review of previous learning (DPS 4520), I analysed my role as an independent knowledge professional engaged in developing management and linguistic programmes for a range of organisations in Italy over many years, and also identified how I managed complexity and change both personally and professionally. After my return to the UK in 1991, I took a Master's degree in sociology and set up a consultancy engaging in research and development projects for the voluntary sector, local government, and local business associations. Through this work, I began collaborating with the National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships (NCWBLP) at Middlesex University, before joining the Centre on a part-time basis in 1999.

I have been a long-standing professional practitioner in transforming knowledge in the work place – consistently mapping my training programmes to situated real-world contexts and externalising participants' own experiences and knowledge to aid the learning process - well before I had even heard the words "work based learning" or become an academic. Today, my practice is an amalgam of academic and work based - placing me in a unique position in the Centre as an insider/outsider capable of understanding the importance of both loci in knowledge transformation processes, although this can cause concomitant problems of conflicting loyalties. This intellectual and practice-based position, together with my previous experience in initiating and leading projects for a range of clients, and my development work with the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sector, has enabled me to initiate and lead the complex DEWBLAM partnership and facilitate collaborative knowledge creation.

The programme planning module (DPS4521) helped to identify prior experiential learning themes that I could claim credits for and provided the rationale for this doctoral project. The initial purpose was to establish a European work based learning partnership with Middlesex practice at the core, but it became clear in the process of writing the bids that this would be unacceptable to the European Commission, to the partners, and to Middlesex itself. However, the core objectives remained, that is: developing autochthonous work based models, transforming the knowledge required to do so, and extending the critical community of wbl practitioners.

The claim for the recognition and accreditation of learning[11] demonstrated how I had extended my professional practice and contributed to knowledge bases from 1995 onwards in areas such as:

- strategic organisational development
- informing local government policy strategies
- development of collaborative partnerships and networks

The contracts for strategic organisational development required considerable diplomacy, careful, ethical management and an inter-disciplinary knowledge base. For example, in one case I had to review the procedures and structures of a failing voluntary organisation to help it improve its standards and meet public funding criteria, requiring me to manage multiple demands and stakeholders and to minimise ensuing conflict and resentment. In another sensitive case, I had to review a failing organisational department and recommend improvements, without being aware of a hidden agenda to close it.

The links between my previous practice and the DEWBLAM project are profound. My intellectual growth has been enhanced through working at Middlesex University and I have been able to ground this in practice over several years of delivering work based management programmes to SME managers, where practice based knowledge was developed in short-term partnerships. Ultimately, this experience, together with my previous experience of initiating and managing projects, enabled me to found the complex and culturally diverse European partnership.

[11] 80 Level 5 credits awarded – see appendix 2

Personal engagement with the DEWBLAM project

My engagement with the DEWBLAM project has been multi-faceted, directly and indirectly influencing change in multiple loci, that is: in SME sector organisations, in HEIs, and ultimately in their economies. The three principal ways in which I have engaged with this project are as follows:

1. Firstly, my role in founding the European partnership has been pivotal – it would not have existed at all without my idea and drive to create it. I have been leading the DEWBLAM project from its inception, innovating and facilitating change across the partnership, providing scientific advice and guidance, and playing a lead role in creating a new community of wbl practitioners. I have introduced work based learning methodologies directly to Italian, German, and Belgian institutions, and this has cascaded to Spain, Finland, and the Czech Republic. I have facilitated collaborative knowledge creation sessions and initiated and managed the development of the common wbl platform.

2. I have facilitated the creation of knowledge in the European partnership, drawing on my previous practice, and engaged further with the SME sector through the development and delivery of an accredited Diploma in Work Based Studies (Management).

3. In my role as Middlesex representative, I have engaged with European protocols and definitions, introducing the NCWBLP to these in order to enhance our understanding and to begin to consider ways of compliance, and have publicly disseminated emerging results of the DEWBLAM project to highlight some of the issues in European higher education that might be applicable in the UK context. Through my engagement with the DEWBLAM project, I have contributed to the development of the Middlesex University Doctorate by Public Works that draws on the Lille model of work based learning, and to the Centre for Excellence bid that included a section on DEWBLAM.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the DEWBLAM project and contextualised my doctoral project within a macro- European framework and a micro-framework of my professional work based practice. I was able to found DEWBLAM, to deal with and unravel its complexities, and to be a major contributor to its successes through my experience gained as an academic practitioner at Middlesex University and a work based practitioner working extensively with the SME sector. This case study is the story of how work based learning was grown in Europe through the DEWBLAM project, but it is also the story of my own personal learning and development that enables me to be a doctoral candidate.

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The stated aim of the DEWBLAM project was to "develop work based learning approaches and models within differing local European cultural and institutional contexts through the creation of a European network of university and non-university partner institutions …defining a common core of … approaches and good practice … (in order) to facilitate access to higher education qualifications for adult employed learners and disadvantaged groups" [12].

It was purposefully designed as a change project to "introduce work based learning practices (that) implement changes in the way HEIs conceive their role and organisation towards adult and continuing education… and establish new links between high-level professional experience, vocational training, and academic knowledge" [13].

Although these change processes fit into action research paradigms, the partnership did not deliberately and consciously design an action research project. For this reason, and principally because the DEWBLAM project has now ended and no further intervention is possible, I am using a case study approach that *retrospectively* analyses context, content, and processes against a framework of local, national or international understandings, theories, and practices.

As a partnership, we collectively owned both the data and theories we produced relating to the common platform, whilst individual institutions owned the subsequent contextual implementations – again fitting action research paradigms, However, as a researcher, I am also telling the DEWBLAM story from a historical perspective, so in this sense, I am generating theory and researching from outside, whilst still having been an involved participant.

Research focus

The long-term aim of the DEWBLAM project lies outside this case study, as it was nothing less than effecting significant changes to the ways in which knowledge and academic programmes are conceived across the partnership. However, it has already challenged existing epistemologies and proposed new paradigms of learning, causing some conflict within institutions and within the partnership as change was resisted. The project objectives[14] were to:

- enable access to HE programmes through accreditation of prior and experiential learning (APEL)

[12] See appendix 1
[13] DEWBLAM project description – innovation section - see appendix 3 p.17
[14] For full description, see appendix 3 p.17

- develop culturally located European models of flexible wbl systems
- incorporate these into ECTS/ECAS frameworks
- establish training programmes and tools for educators
- incorporate wbl in HE and contribute to creating knowledge in the work place
- promote equality of opportunity and lifelong learning
- generate a European-wide wbl debate and network

Now, at project conclusion, with the objectives achieved and presented to the European Commission for verification, these are merely a starting point for the real challenge of growing and embedding the initial work based learning approaches in the single contexts. Over the past three years, the partners have matured in their understanding and practices of work based learning, initially helped by my guidance and theoretical inputs. However, the long-term impact on their institutions and on their knowledge and learning economies cannot now be determined, but as European discourses continue to emphasise flexible lifelong learning and the employability agenda, the partner institutions will find themselves at the forefront of learning innovations by virtue of the knowledge that has been created through this project.

Given the many clusters of knowledge generation and practice within such a rich, complex picture, I have decided to focus on the most important substantive uniting thread and catalyst that enabled the partnership to collaboratively and singly generate and transform knowledge, and to achieve its objectives. Therefore, the overall research question will:

- inquire into the process of developing a common European work based learning platform

To achieve this, I will:

- frame the project within a postmodern meta-narrative
- critically analyse the complexity and tensions of the DEWBLAM partnership
- critically analyse the processes of collaborative knowledge generation
- evaluate and frame the platform definitions within current thinking
- identify contributions to current understandings of the polarity of academic and work based knowledge and learning

Methodological approach

As I have no prior positivist hypothesis to prove or disprove, nor do I have theoretical preconceptions or espoused notions here (Armsby, 2000), the most appropriate methodology for this inquiry is one of phenomenological, interpretative constructivism, enabling me to contextualise and construct theories that arise from the actions, contradictions, and processes of change (Zuber-Skeritt, 1997), and to include pertinent aspects of human interactions (Cohen et al, 2000). The way in which knowledge emerging from the process of developing the common platform was articulated is

consonant with the concept of iterative living theory (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), whereby theories generated from within practice influence new practices that lead to further new theories and new practices - this same concept also extends to the SME programmes. Whilst this methodology is implicit in the DEWBLAM project, my doctoral project uses a case study approach, which is not longitudinal, but does have chronological sequences as shown in figure 2 on page 15 below.

Statistical research is irrelevant to this study, and therefore I use qualitative research allowing me to more freely theorise the *how* and *why* of particular events and processes; to analyse the dynamics of change and cognition; to incorporate a sense of the holistic ecology; to narrate the journey; and also to identify and analyse the collaborative construction of meanings (Cassell & Symon, 1995) within a commonly negotiated work based learning linguistic domain (Gammack & Stephens, 1995:74).

Methods

My overarching research approach is a case study, using the main data collection techniques of participant observer, reflective practice, and documentary analysis.

I have not included a specific literature review, as I have integrated and refer to literature throughout this doctoral project to support or critique my findings and analyses.

Yin (2002:13) defines a case study as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". This definition matches my choice of an explanatory case study combining methods that will explain the project contextual conditions, events, and substantive issues which are intricately linked and highly pertinent to the study, and will also generate theory that may be relevant and useable in other contexts (Gorad & Taylor, 2004).

Hartley (1995) posits the importance of developing theoretical frameworks within case studies, in order to lift them from bounded descriptions of unique issues to ideas about events that are of wider significance. Whilst the DEWBLAM project itself is bounded, its theories and products go beyond its confines and are potentially applicable and relatable to a wide range of situations. My justifications for using a case study are several:

- it serves to gain a holistic overview of the project ecology
- it helps in understanding behavioural and systemic changes, whilst potentially influencing but not directly manipulating these
- it permits a range of methods without "hard and fast rules" (Lee, 1999:55), such as those I have used in this project: observation, textual analysis, literature review and a small sample of questionnaires
- the context and data are retrospectively analysed and interpreted and no dynamic intervention or participation is now possible - learning and knowledge generated

can be cascaded into new situations, but can no longer be tested within the same common or individual contexts

- a case study explains causal links, describes processes and contexts, illustrates certain topics, and also explores a situation that has multiple but not a single set of outcomes (Yin, 2002; Hartley, 1995)
- it will enable me to evaluate the DEWBLAM project - its potential impact as well as its failures; to analyse its methodologies, epistemologies, and its interactions; and ultimately to reference it within current debates on types and sites of knowledge generation
- finally, it enables me to identify and propose ideas that have emerged from the project, but that may have wider significance

Case study test through action research indicators

Criticism (Cohen et al, 2000) of case study as being too biased and specific to check reliability and validity, and concomitantly incapable of allowing generalisation, resonates here. The DEWBLAM partnership project - its objectives, dynamics, processes, contexts, discourses and outcomes are all unique and, therefore, neither replicable nor open to analytic generalisation (Yin, 2002). However, retrospective analysis enables the identification of discernible patterns, and the in-depth explanation of this case study and its visible outcomes allow "relatability" on the part of the reader to other situations.

In order to provide some testing of the project validity, I have used two key principles of action research as defined by Jameson & Hillier (2003: 20, 21):

- firstly, decision making was reached mainly by democratic consensus
- secondly, the common processes were participative, emanicapatory, democratic, and clearly made "a difference as (they took) place, (enabling) reflection, challenge and the implementation of change".

I have also summarised the authors' ten generic action research indicators in Figure 2 below, showing how the processes of the DEWBLAM project can be crosschecked against these and against the case study data for validity. It should be noted that whilst the design and data of the DEWBLAM project match these indicators, my doctoral project was retrospective, and, therefore, better suited to a case study approach.

Figure 2 - The 10 action research (AR) indicators, DEWBLAM & case study data

AR INDICATORS	DEWBLAM	CASE STUDY DATA
Identification of issues and improvements/change needed	Identification of need to implement wbl in HE programmes according to Bologna process	Partners identified, project funds obtained, and contracts signed

Decide on possible field of action and barriers	Decision to conduct contextual research in each partner institution, identify barriers, create a common core of work based learning principles through the wbl platform and guidelines, and develop wbl pilots	Initial data from national and institutional situations researched and collated
Devise general plan of action	3-year detailed work plan devised	Discussed and agreed at first general steering meeting
Break plan into specific steps	Plan broken down into year by year actions allocated to partners	Meetings and actions agreed and timetabled
Commence action	Commenced 2003 (and completed 2006)	Seminars on wbl theories and practice held. Initial research into potential wbl pilots. Community web site established
Monitor action and identify possible changes required	Changes identified and implemented eg: enhanced focus on common platform and pilots	6-monthly monitoring reports produced. Frequent e-communication. Platform drafted
Revise general plan to incorporate changes	General focus remained but greater shift towards implementations in individual contexts	Gradual pilot development and implementation
Move towards action plan goal with ongoing monitoring/revisions	Monitoring on-going progress and finance	Internal reporting to co-ordination meetings and external annually to EU
Maintain records of decisions	All decisions taken collectively	Recorded in minutes and electronically distributed
Evaluate outcomes and process using research data generated	Evaluated annually, with final dissemination conference and report to EU Commission end of year 3	Platform completed. 3 wbl pilots successfully developed and implemented. Guidelines to programme development completed. European conference held. All financial and project reports submitted for external evaluation by the European Commission

Validity and reliability

Internal validity ensures that the research data can be examined and logically sustained, whilst external validity enables the data to be applied to other situations. Whilst this is a case study that focuses mainly on identifying and codifying the processes applied to achieving a common knowledge base, thereby ensuring internal validity, it is also potentially a unique situation which would not necessarily occur in a similar or comparable way, given a different set of partners, parameters, dynamics, or objectives.

Does this fact, therefore, make this case study invalid and unreliable? Yes, if one is looking to replicate context and data in another situation for external validity. No, if it is considered that this is a qualitative study, using unique data produced from within the project by all partners according to their own understandings and needs, and then validated through *local* applications of *common* principles. Indeed, data could *not* be exactly replicated, as one of the core objectives of the DEWBLAM project was the *differentiation* of local solutions according to local requirements.

However, locating the emerging *ideas,* rather than the data, in a wider sphere is a test of validity by inference. One of the significant aspects of this study supporting the notion of relatability is the development of the common work based learning platform and related pilot programmes, that are aimed both at internal consumption by the partners and at dissemination to a wider audience, thereby enabling the testing of key processes and products, and a measure of generalisability and transferability (Lee, 1999).

Validity can be further tested through the notion of ecological validity that "includes the major features of the context in which the phenomenon of interest is found" (ibid:152). In this study, the macro/micro external and internal contexts and epistemologies are significant factors of analysis and are an integral part of the research, having contributed both to instigating and influencing the course of the project – without these there would be little meaning.

Additionally, the use of multiple sources and participants fit the notion of construct validity (Yin, 2002). Triangulation comes from the documentation produced during the project (Forster, 1995) and also by confrontation of the generated ideas with current thinking, as throughout this doctoral project I will draw on literature to support or refute the theories and definitions emerging from our work and practices.

Personal position as researcher

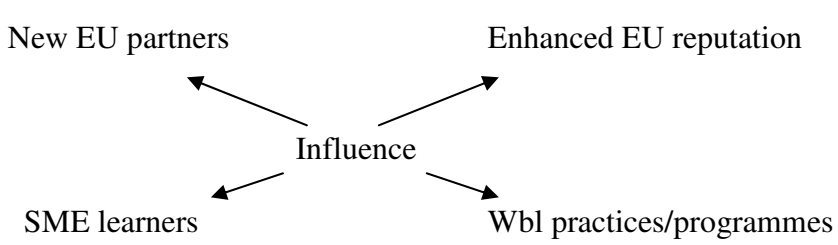
An ethnographic approach is particularly appropriate here, as it demands both the participation of the observer within the social setting and the interpretation of observer experiences (Zuber-Skerritt, 1997). As a partner participant in the DEWBLAM project, I was an insider but, concomitantly, I am now an outsider observer as I try to make sense of what happened. It is difficult to remain objective when fully engaged in the process – episodes of contestation can be particularly emotive and subjective - but as the project

has now concluded, I am in a better position to reflect and critique my own praxis, in addition to analysing the processes under scrutiny.

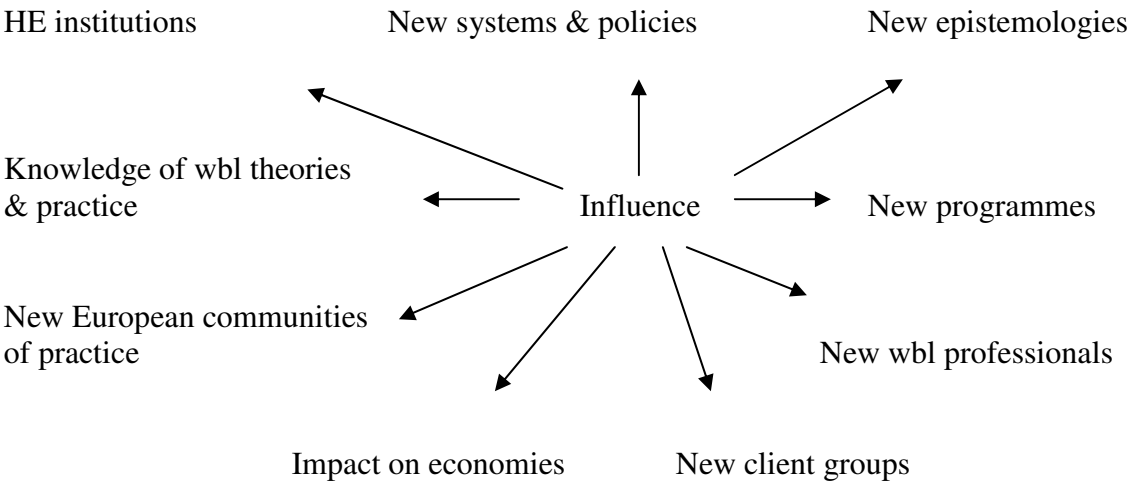
My previous experience of research (see chapter one) in a variety of often difficult and contradictory situations has informed my ethnographic approach to this doctoral project, where I grapple with conflicting epistemologies and analyse the multiple and contested processes of creating a common narrative and of generating common knowledge in such a diverse partnership. As noted in the introductory chapter, my professional practice is embedded in organisational research and development and also in academia as a work based practitioner – this dual role itself can at times lead to inner conflict and divided loyalties as I consider the merits of organisational and academic knowledge, and I need to remain highly reflexive and aware of my subjective constructions throughout (Armsby, 2000) in order to resolve this conflict. The multiplicity of roles during this project – researcher/participant, adviser/leader/facilitator and employee/self-employed – at times constituted a hindrance in deciphering the most appropriate approach to take in changing situations but, concomitantly, the varied background of experiences helped in dealing with problems or conflicts.

In my role of organisational consultant - particularly in my work with SMEs - I acquired deep learning of facilitating dynamic knowledge transformation processes that generated new situated, practice based and theoretical knowledge. This pre-understanding of work based learning programmes in practice, together with my academic practice at Middlesex University, has significantly underpinned my engagement with the DEWBLAM project, where I was a leader, a "scientific adviser" on wbl, and also a learner. The level of pre-understanding that I brought to this project informed my initial position of strength and, therefore, I felt I had less to learn and more to impart – this inhibited me from immersing myself more fully in European perspectives on education and knowledge until the latter part of the project when the partners had matured in their understandings and required less guidance. My personal position is, therefore, a highly complex one where I directly facilitated or indirectly influenced change in three contexts, illustrated in figure 3 below.

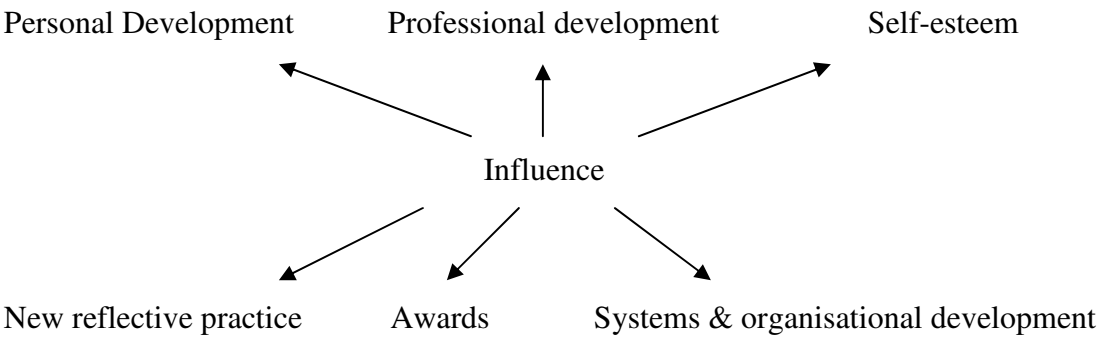
Figure 3 – Personal complex role



Context 2 – DEWBLAM



Context 3 – The SME practitioners



Ethics

In introducing epistemological and practice-based change, a key question is whether this is ethical. Given that the DEWBLAM project operated within the new European educational agenda that has direct impact on national/local economic and social situations and needs, change was not a choice - it was inevitable. However, this does not mean that change was willingly accepted – several partner institutions indeed fiercely resisted it – and my role at times was that of a catalyst and a pawn, bringing change where it was not wanted. It is, therefore, less a question of whether change is ethical, rather more one of engaging stakeholders and adapting to suit individual situations.

The complexity of my involvement with the project (see figure 3 above) demonstrates the levels of inter-relatedness with people, practices, and processes, each of which have their own set of values. Cultural sensitivities, values, and differences are acknowledged and discussed throughout the text and indeed form an important part of this research. The small sample of questionnaires used protects anonymity, and whilst I may refer to minutes of meetings, I have deliberately not included them in appendices as they often reflected individual thought processes, were collectively owned by the partnership and are, therefore, not in the public domain. Other documents used are already public, published, or held on personal copyright.

Conclusion

As the DEWBLAM context is retrospective, and there is no possibility to design a fresh project, a case study seems to be the most appropriate method. To summarise, this case study will:

- examine the ecology within which the project developed
- critically analyse the complexity, issues, and tensions of the partnership through the processes of collaborative knowledge generation
- analyse how work based learning was grown through the development of the common European work based learning platform and the effect this had on epistemologies
- evaluate the potential significance of the DEWBLAM project on local learning economies
- link understandings of the polarity of academic and work based learning emerging from the project to current thinking and practices

CHAPTER 3 – THE DEWBLAM ECOLOGY

Introduction

The European Union agenda for developing a globally competitive knowledge economy is forcing radical educational change through programme modularisation and through an increasing focus on learners gaining competences for employment, and, as a consequence, higher education institutions are being obliged to shift their traditional perceptions that knowledge is exclusively generated within the academy to acknowledging that knowledge might also be located in the work place[15]. The new socio/economic and political background to the DEWBLAM project was introduced in chapter one, and in this chapter I will focus on analysing the project ecology against changing epistemologies.

The knowledge revolution

The context that best helps to position DEWBLAM's struggles is that of the new postmodern reality, and a key issue underlying the project discourses has been that of modernity versus the postmodern, consonant with the struggle between the traditionally conceived knowledge domains of the Enlightenment and those now being constructed and legitimated through performativity. Lyotard (1984) has argued that the modernity characterised by dominant Western discourses of science, progress, and rationality and the educational systems to support these, is losing relevance in this era of plural truths, uncertainty and rapid changes. Indeed, knowledge itself is becoming increasingly commodified (Edwards, 1998) and performative[16], where knowledge is valued as to its saleability and utility (rather than its "truth") and is legitimated through its capacity to enhance and induce performance in the work place (Edwards & Usher, 2000).

In the European arena, these new constructs are visible as higher education begins to comply with EU protocols and to engage with the new realities of knowledge. This is occurring at national implementation levels and also at local levels as national and European funding strands become more focused on lifelong learning competencies and employability – fully corroborated by the aims of DEWBLAM that had to match European funding parameters.

As knowledge epistemologies were quietly and subtly transformed through developing the common work based platform and individualised pilot programmes, a revolution has taken place within the DEWBLAM partner institutions; but this transformation has even now not been fully and consciously fore-grounded. Although discourses have increasingly focused on notions of competence, engagement with the paradigm shift in knowledge epistemologies was often unwilling - demonstrated particularly by strong

[15] See discussions in chapter 5

[16] I have used the term "practice based" synonymously with "performative" knowledge throughout

academic opposition to work based learning in the German (Aachen) and Czech (Prague) partner institutions, despite the presence of high-level champions in the executive. Indeed, perhaps this unease was prescient given the far-reaching impact that postmodern epistemologies might have on higher education – a theme that is further discussed in chapter five.

Other partners experienced different degrees of opposition. For example, despite initial difficulties but ultimately driven by pragmatic local economic and social needs, Granada successfully developed and implemented in conjunction with industrial partners a pilot award in "Subtitling for the Deaf and Audio-description for the Blind" that offered both "traditional" and innovative wbl pathways (see appendix 4). The universities of Florence and Abo both struggled to identify appropriate wbl pilots as their institutions preferred to maintain their existing tested programmes without experimenting with new approaches. Despite the fact that both countries have legislated to allow the use of APEL procedures[17], this remains underused and "relatively ineffectual" (Adams, 2006:39) – a picture replicated across Europe, where APEL is used mainly for entry into existing academic programmes, if at all.

More favourable conditions prevailed for other partners such as the University of Lille, which has been operating work based learning degrees for over ten years. Indeed, France has been in the forefront of modernising its higher education system through legislation (from 1985-2002), allowing full awards through the demonstration of life and work experiences and competences, as well as enabling differentiated entry to taught degrees through accreditation[18]. Belgium has also moved rapidly towards allowing APEL and wbl in university programmes, and Limburg was able to draw on my early advice and guidance, developing a degree in social care with part exemption through APEL in the first year of the project (see appendix 5). The UK HET[19] system allows independence for universities, so wbl and APEL practices are varied and acceptable, although not currently enshrined in legislation. However, to some extent, despite twelve years of awarding degrees in work based learning, the NCWBLP has suffered from similar non-acceptance of its epistemology from colleagues across the university. Even here, much still needs to be done in order for work to be fully recognised as a locus where knowledge is independently generated, as well as being a potential recipient of academic knowledge transfer.

As the workplace becomes constituted as a "..discursive domain…of thought and action.." (Edwards & Usher, 2000: 43) where knowledge is produced and legitimated by the worker as researcher, knower, and learner, universities risk being sidelined if they continue to "favour some forms of knowing and marginalise others" (Barnett, 1999:14) in a one-dimensional approach that ignores the knowledge of the work place. Work based learning programmes can be seen as going some way to recognising the validity of the work place as a site of learning and knowledge, but the need remains to explore ways of meshing academic and work based knowledge into programmes of transformative

[17] Devolved to regional governments in the case of Italy
[18] APEL system known as VAE - Validation des Aquis de l'Éxperience
[19] Higher Education and Training – term used across Europe and emblematic of the new vocationalisation

learning that transcend both APEL processes and tick-box assessments of professional competences such as those used in vocational programmes (see chapter five for a fuller discussion).

The need for a meta-narrative

Against this postmodern background of diverse multiple realities and epistemologies, compounded by the differing cultures, practices, and pre-understandings of partner representatives, it was vital to establish a common discourse and a common domain in order to move the project forward and to create the transformative knowledge required to implement work based learning approaches. Discourse is never singular, as a variety co-exists in any situation, nor even equal in power relations (Edwards and Usher, 2000), but it is through amalgamation or convergence that domains are contested and constructed. Initially, the discourse of the work based approaches coined by Middlesex University was pre-eminent, supported to some extent by that of the University of Lille. A clear example of this can be seen in the common wbl platform I first drafted in late 2004 (see appendix 12), that was naturally closely aligned to the Middlesex model, but later editions changed with increasing focus on competences as Middlesex wbl discourse became less dominant, and new common understandings of wbl were negotiated.

In the European partnership, multiple narratives textualised and contextualised the differing practices specific to each institution and nation, therefore it was challenging to construct a meta-narrative that could be individually relevant to and owned by all its constituent members and yet act as a common domain. Influencing factors included:

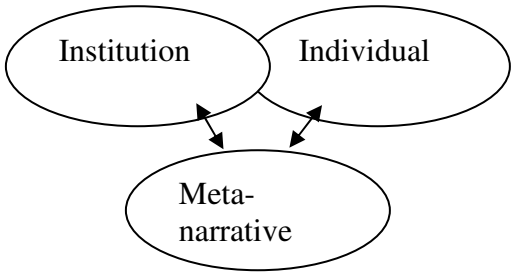
- national legislation
- academic/work knowledge, pre-understanding and practices
- institutional, cultural, and individual discourses
- languages
- traditions
- social practices

Through negotiated understanding of work based learning epistemologies and practices (the meta-narrative), the partnership established common ground and common domains expressed in the project aims. This was a dynamic and painstaking process using the media of meetings, seminars, and web communications during which the partners represented their individual realities, and I had a significant role in influencing the construction of both the common domain and the initial meta-narrative through holding seminars and workshops on work based learning. With growing partnership maturity, the emerging narratives were often vigorously contested (see chapter four) and, in some cases, the validity of institutional academic approaches to knowledge was questioned when confronted with the new possibilities: for example, the obduracy of the Aachen Fachhochschule compounded by the State Ministry for Education in refusing to accept or pilot wbl, preferring to maintain a traditional focus. The culmination, or product, was the jointly developed, dynamic *European* common wbl platform; however, in order to make sense of this in single contexts, it needed to be justified and rationalised through

individual and localised constructs of meaning (Weick, 1995) that informed the wbl pilots.

The bilateral process of transference (shown in figure 4 below) of individual/institutional internal understandings and discourse to and from the common domain affected not only the meta-narrative, but is also likely to affect internal discourses in the future as partners gain experience and knowledge through the common domain and through their contextualised practices.

Figure 4 – Discourse transference



Extending this concept to Middlesex, it can be seen that work based discourse journeys continuously between stakeholders, thereby allowing a multiplicity of meanings that are constructed by the owners (the National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships and the university), by its operators (academics and students), and by its audiences (other academics, regulatory bodies, readers, researchers, other higher education institutions, and organisations). However, the new knowledge generated by this process often remains tacit, only becoming converted to explicit when it is consciously fore-grounded into reviews, or enhanced/new materials are developed as reactions to institutional or business demands. The recent hard-won executive decision to transform the NCWBLP into an Institute for Work Based Learning will significantly inform and change current discourses - and perhaps even epistemologies - as its development plan shifts the centre of gravity towards greater engagement with industry in knowledge-generating partnerships and in work-force development. This strongly echoes the trend discussed above of viewing knowledge as valuable for its performativity or structural capital and for its saleability as a product (Edvinsson & Malone, 1998).

The internal environment

The external environment in which DEWBLAM operated has already been extensively discussed and, whilst this could not be influenced, the internal conditions could be. In order for learning and knowledge creation to occur across challenging “positional differences” (Lee & Boud, 2003:195), conditions needed to be created that were shared, democratic, dialectical, and non-threatening and that allowed the emergence of relationships - although these were not always positive, particularly during meetings

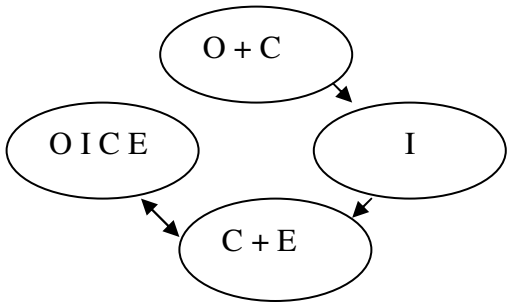
when some representatives considered their budget allocation was incommensurate with their perceived input (not minuted).

To understand how the internal environment enabled the transformation of knowledge, I have adapted the concept of the four Ba[20] - originating, interacting, cyber and exercising – that Nonaka & Konno (1998) had amalgamated with the phases of the SECI[21] knowledge conversion model:

- *Originating (socialisation phase)* where emotions and mental models are shared
- *Interacting (externalisation phase)* where joint meanings and concepts are created and knowledge transformation commences
- *Cyber (combination phase)* a virtual and collaborative environment where existing and new knowledge is combined
- *Exercising (internalisation phase)* where an individual iteratively learns and creates knowledge through active participation

Whilst Nonaka and Konno's concept is presented as a static deterministic model with ordered linear progression, for DEWBLAM, the process of knowledge creation was a more dynamic, iterative, and chaotic spiral represented in figure 5 below. Here, new knowledge was transformed continuously through application in different ways and in specific contexts, and then transferred back to the cyber core (community web site) enabling the development of different meanings, mental models, understanding, and further learning.

Figure 5 – The "Ba" in DEWBLAM



Key: O: originating**; I:** interacting; **C:** cyber; **E:** exercising; **OICE:** continuous interaction

During the first project phase, the partners shared their mental models of work based learning and their external operating conditions in meetings and on the web (O + C), these were transformed (I) and rapidly combined with new knowledge and active participation (C + E). With the growth of maturity, there was continuous, and at times,

[20] Coined by Japanese philosopher Kitaro Nishida
[21] Socialisation, Externalisation, Combination, Internalisation - developed by Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995)

seemingly chaotic interaction (OICE), as knowledge was generated in separate sites, filtered back to the centre where it was scrutinised, and added to, before being applied in the single contexts [22]. Above all, the "ba" was our shared interactive physical/virtual space, evolving as partners contributed their own contexts.

The learning partnership

In order to enable collaborative learning and knowledge creation, the partnership needed to be democratic and dialectical and neither a locus of power nor merely a conduit for transmitting existing information. As dependence on established paradigms and on my "mentorship" diminished through "reflective conversation" (Schoen, 1991:295), concomitantly parity grew and meanings were differentiated and challenged, leading to joint construction of new theories. Throughout this 3-year project, I have been viewed as founder and expert, and considerable anger was expressed on several occasions during meetings when it was felt that my commitment was not as full as expected. However, I thought at the time that it was important to stand back and allow the partners the opportunity to "fully engage their own knowledgeability" (Wenger, 1998:10), to develop their own practices at an early stage without interferences or bias, and to freely form a community of European work based practice – of which I remain a part.

On retrospective reflection, perhaps this style of facilitative leadership was more effective in my workshops with the SME participants where practitioners were already frequently knowledgeable and experienced, but not so appropriate where people felt they needed extensive mentoring. The question here is whether a democratic approach is right in an early team-learning situation. Certainly initially, information was transmitted to the partnership in order to create a knowledge baseline and the project co-ordinator relied heavily on my steering and advice, so I was leading an immature team from the front, but once this first phase had been completed, the team needed to be enabled rather than led. The Diploma in Work Based Studies (Management) [23] I developed as my project pilot (see appendix 6:5), posited that an effective leader provided vision, objectives, feedback, support, and rewards/recognition and also that a mature team held experience, was independent, motivated to achieve, and was willing to take responsibility. Both these sets of characteristics are consonant with the DEWBLAM partnership, and I think that it was right to enable team learning through back-grounding my own experience and knowledge – perhaps it was just too early before the team was sufficiently mature.

Although meanings and values were initially aligned to the dominant discourse, when these were differentiated in each individual reality and were owned by the stakeholders (people and institutions), then "economies of meaning" (Wenger, 1998:197) emerged that were identified by systems of relative values, of ownership, and of legitimation. These economies at times harmonised with the common meanings generated by the new community of practice, but conflict also occurred as highlighted above and, for example,

[22] See figure 2 in chapter two and also chapter four
[23] Contributions to leadership module also made by SME practitioners in previous Certificate workshops

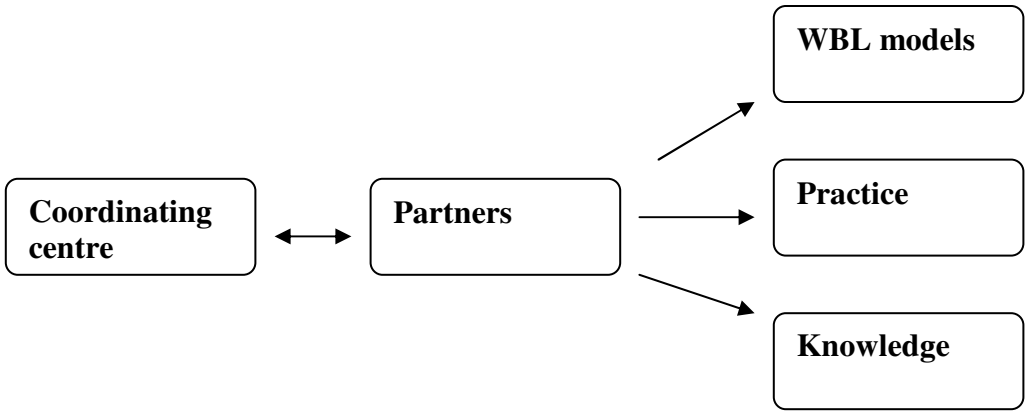
when the Belgian partners were perceived to withhold the knowledge generated through their wbl programme.

The complexity of the DEWBLAM relationships where each partner operated within a unique, discrete system of principles, and processes, yet was linked to a holistic meta-**system** of collaborative knowledge creation and learning, can be conceptualised through Senge's (1993) model of organisational systems thinking. By actively co-creating within our community of practice and enabling "inventive participation" (Wenger, 1998:10), knowledge, learning, and the building of **shared vision** were participatory and not prescriptive. At times, however, this dynamic shared process conflicted with other espoused personal, institutional, or national visions and **mental models**, requiring significant inventiveness and will to overcome them. The dialectical and dialogic approach to building the shared vision enabled the partnership to work and learn as a **team**, whilst **mastery** - or learnedness and capability - was gradually acquired through the "continual clarifying and deepening of personal vision and the focusing of energies" (Senge, 1993:7).

The DEWBLAM architecture

Almost to the end of the three-year project, the central coordinating structure received mainly partial and unidirectional knowledge that was always filtered by the individual partners as visualised in figure 6 below:

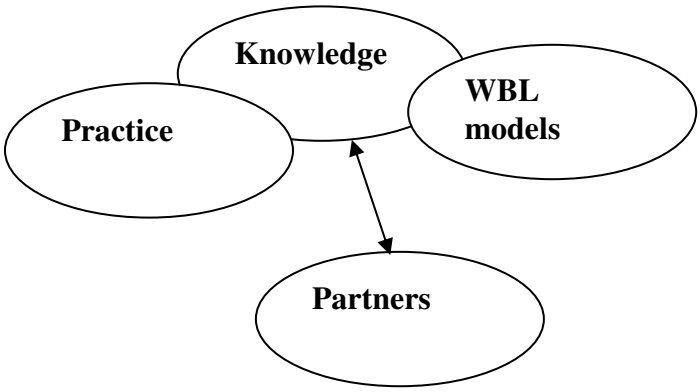
Figure 6 – DEWBLAM architecture



This was a key weakness, with concomitant risk that much of the knowledge generated could not easily be utilised or shared, and ultimately has hindered the identification of further opportunities for the whole partnership. Strategy needed to be defined in a clearer way, perhaps by developing a knowledge map with domains, links, and segments (Tissen

et al, 1998) that could emerge from the basis of the common wbl platform. Additionally, in order for knowledge to be transformed into a spiral that could be shared, transferred, and amplified (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), it needed to *be* at the centre (as shown in figure 7 below) together with practice and wbl models, thus becoming part of a more dynamic process engendering and leveraging change, rather than remaining as a static, locally relevant *product*.

Figure 7 – Enhanced DEWBLAM architecture



Increased use of the community web site eventually led to the enhanced sharing of knowledge and practice, so that the model in figure 7 above is more representative of the final structure, but the lack of coherent and transparent systems during the project encouraging greater knowledge sharing was a distinct collective failure.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the project ecology, setting the DEWBLAM partnership within a background of shifting and contested epistemologies, relating some of the pre-conditions and contexts within which each partner operated, highlighting the need for a meta-narrative, and identifying the internal partnership conditions and architecture. Understanding these external and internal contexts will help to clarify the processes of creating knowledge analysed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4 – GROWING WORK BASED LEARNING IN THE PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

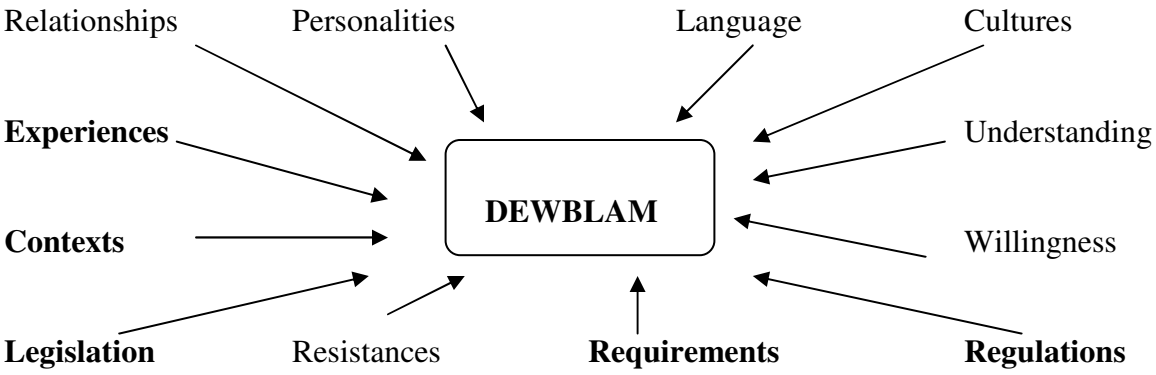
This chapter focuses on the complexity of the DEWBLAM partnership and the three significant aspects of creating knowledge: on the *process,* on textual analysis of the *result* - the common work based learning platform - and on the *application* in the separate contexts. I will also critically analyse those aspects of the development of the Certificate and Diploma in Work Based Studies (Management) that formed my initial work based learning practice and that can be inferred as relevant to the European project.

Complexities and tensions

It will already have become apparent that the DEWBLAM context was fraught with complexities and tensions affecting each partner institution and the project as a collective entity - linguistic and cultural diversity were potentially divisive; resistance to the new unknown of work based learning grew; and local, national, and European legislation was often at variance.

Figure 8 below represents both the complexity and the main tensions of the DEWBLAM context, as these are inter-dependent (with the **overt** in bold).

Figure 8 – DEWBLAM complexities and tensions



Relationships and personalities – partners needed to supersede barriers of personality, nationality, language, culture, and attachment to the local, although this was not easy as highlighted earlier. Interaction, or social learning, combined with intellect and the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and information helped in the processes of

knowledge creation (Tissen et al, 1998), but these interactions were often tense, and small alliances were formed by project end, detracting from the holistic "ba".

Language and cultures – eight native languages were spoken by the 13 partner organisations (Czech, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Swedish[24]) with English as the first and German as the second officially registered language for communication, but these differences of national and organisational culture and identity expressed through languages, systems, behaviours, and attitudes had to be back-grounded in order to reach common understanding and a collective identity through the use of the meta-narrative.

Experiences and understanding initially differed widely but by project end some partners had gained direct experience by implementing programmes that either contained elements of learning based in the work place or used professional competency frameworks. However, all partners were able to grow in understanding through contributing to conceptualising the common platform and the guidelines for developing wbl programmes.

Willingness, requirements, and resistances – all partner representatives were personally willing to participate in the project but in several cases (Italy, Finland, and Germany), the respective institutions posed resistances. For example, academics at the Fachhochschule Aachen – despite some executive support, involvement with European modularisation, and winning a national prize for innovation (February, 2005) through its participation in the DEWBLAM project - continued to resist the implementation of a work based learning programme, questioning the validity and legitimacy of research and learning occurring outside of the academy. There might possibly have been less resistance had an influential academic represented the university, rather than a member of the administrative staff.

Contexts, regulations, and legislation significantly impacted on acceptance or resistance to wbl. In the German example, despite European agreements and national law that allows for wbl, the state of Rheinland-Westphalia refused to permit Aachen University to implement wbl programmes. In other national contexts, wbl is allowed but may still be seen as too innovative (see chapter 1).

The process of developing work based knowledge in the European partnership

Nonaka & Takeuchi (1995) identify three key characteristics of knowledge creation: the use of figurative or symbolic language, the sharing of personal knowledge, and the use of ambiguity and redundancy. The language used during the DEWBLAM project was that of academia and current business usage, but although there was a definitive shift from "pure imagination…(to)… logical thinking" (ibid:16) moving from initial ideas to practical implementation, it would have been difficult to find common symbolism, given

[24] The Finnish partner institution was from the Swedish linguistic minority

the diversity of the partnership. The second characteristic of sharing personal knowledge has been an essential part of the process of knowledge creation, supporting the authors' contention that an individual's personal knowledge is transformed into organisational knowledge and can be the starting point for new knowledge. Ambiguity and redundancy, understood as conditions that enable new ways of thinking to emerge from chaos or the creation of "common cognitive ground" (ibid:18), resonate with the DEWBLAM process which seemed to be endlessly chaotic as numerous and often repetitive discussions took place before the common work based learning platform provided a focal point and enabled the development of some pilot programmes.

Several parallels can be drawn from developing work based learning in the DEWBLAM partnership (shown in figure 9 below) with the SME process described in the next section (see also figure 10 p.34), as knowledge was transferred, collectively generated, applied and tested in individual contexts, collectively and separately re-conceptualised and codified in the platform, then embedded and codified in different programmes and systems:

Figure 9 – Stages in DEWBLAM work based learning developments

FEATURES	PROCESSES
1. Creation of a common vision	Harmonisation of perceptions through meetings, socialising, virtual communication
2. Institution of a democratic approach	Establishment of consensual decision making, incorporation of diversity and levels of pre-understanding
3. Transfer of knowledge	Papers, workshops, seminars, presentations
4. Sharing of knowledge	Research and communication
5. Codification of knowledge in platform	Conceptualisation of wbl theories, writing
6. Collective and individual learning	Internalisation of knowledge leading to new experiences and applications
7. Development of wbl experiences	Identification of suitable resources, approaches, and disciplines
8. Pilot programmes and support systems	Testing and initial evaluation, reflection on practice
9. Embed wbl theories and practices	Institutionalisation through systems and new mental models, validation of experiences and practices
10. Establish a community of practice	Sharing and reviewing new knowledge internally and with wider audiences through papers, seminars, and conferences
11. Contribute to changing learning/knowledge economies	Analysing significance and local impact of wbl on institutions, learners and environments. Reports to internal/external stakeholders.

1 & 2. Creation of a common vision and democratic approach – although the objectives were set by a core group of partners (from the UK, Italy, Belgium, and Germany) before the project obtained funding from the European Union in order to develop a common vision that could drive and sustain the whole partnership, perceptions, goals, and practices needed to be aligned. To obtain the collaboration of all partners in achieving this, formal meetings and informal socialising opportunities were used that motivated and valued people for sharing their knowledge. A democratic, consensual, and inclusive approach to decision making was agreed during the first meeting on my suggestion – inviting all partners to participate in the steering group meetings, thus enabling and empowering us to have an equal voice and equal value, despite the fact that initially there was an inner core, a leader, and a coordinator.

The language of communication was English – spoken and understood with differing levels of expertise – but more important than language difficulties were the definition of the common vision, common understandings and of the meta-narrative[25]. Pre-understandings differed widely as has been previously noted and caused substantial tensions when these were fore-grounded; however, ultimately, these differences added to the overall knowledge capital. Tissen *et al* (1998:171) hypothesise that Europeans "...eagerly seek out concepts, theories and methodology to improve performance", and this was indeed the case with much discussion over epistemologies.

3 & 4. Knowledge transfer and sharing – whilst the significant expertise of Middlesex and Lille Universities was called upon to leverage theoretical and working knowledge (Dixon, 2000), both avoided wholesale transfers of explicit systems. This was because the recipients were unlikely to have identical contexts to enable exploitation, the project aims were to *develop* indigenous programmes, and there were important issues of ownership as it was not in the commercial interests of the universities to freely transfer their knowledge assets. Therefore, the features of the wbl systems already in operation were shared in meetings, seminars, and workshops, but the finely detailed processes were not.

5. Codification of the common wbl platform was pivotal in centralising and generating conceptual knowledge, acting firstly as a theoretical framework and source that partners could interpret and apply in their specific contexts, before reflecting on and filtering their experiences back to enhance the platform.

6. Learning was individual, collective, and institutional, beginning to change practices and have an effect on social environments. Reflecting the differences in contexts, one partner highlighted the "mental impact" on key institutional figures that enabled both the planning of a work based learning programme despite resistances and a new way of thinking about organising learning; whilst another partner considered that wbl approaches should be standardised across the EU before having an impact on local education policies[26]. One of the prime drivers of change was the requirement of the European Union to align higher education awards and to meet the perceived needs of the new

[25] See chapter three
[26] See appendix 7 for questionnaires

knowledge economy through professional profiling, the increasing vocationalisation of education and through competency frameworks[27]. This requires a paradigm shift from learning *per se* to learning *fit for purpose*[28], concomitantly becoming a less socially "dangerous" activity as it increasingly focuses on changing practices rather than questioning established societal systems (Jarvis et al: 1998).

7, 8, & 9. Develop pilot programmes and experiences – as the partners began to adapt and apply relevant elements of the platform, the pilots needed to be tested, evaluated, and institutionalised through supporting systems (see section below on applications).

10. Communities of practice are still being established both internally and externally to individual institutions as new knowledge is shared with wider audiences through workshops, papers, seminars, conferences, etc. Open seminars were held in Aachen and Prague in an attempt to overcome local resistance, and this should gradually diminish as work based learning becomes part of discourses and understandings – particularly when economic needs drive the search for new sources of learners and income, and as focus increases on knowledge partnerships between business and higher education in order to meet the requirements of the EU knowledge society. Framing work based learning within a European community of practice will benefit all partners, enabling multi-directional knowledge flows and international referencing that strengthens indigenous practices. This is already visible in examples such as Granada which incorporated aspects of the Middlesex practice to include a research module in their new programme, or Middlesex which drew on the Lille experience to offer a full APEL doctorate and also organised the July 2007 UALL[29] WBL Network conference to include European perspectives.

11. Learning and knowledge economies change at a slower pace than institutions, but there is growing recognition at European and at partnership level that there is a need to engage directly with businesses and to incorporate their learning requirements into the higher education agenda. Work based approaches are ideal as economies change from supply-led to demand-led with concomitant effect on cost and educational programmes, and partners have implemented programmes that were *jointly* developed with industry. The "social partnership" aspect of both the local and the European learning economies is constituted through formal legal agreements and institutional frameworks and is enhanced by social dialogue, mutual understandings, and trust (Nyhan et al, 2003) - in this perspective, the DEWBLAM partnership can contribute to education and can impact on a wider European economy as well as on each local or regional cluster.

Learning to facilitate knowledge creation in the SME context

The experience to facilitate the complex process of knowledge creation within the DEWBLAM partnership grew from my previous practice with SME managers, where theory and practice reciprocally informed each other and new knowledge domains were

[27] See appendix 8 for the Tuning project aimed at aligning HE frameworks and www.unideusto.org
[28] See chapter 5 for a fuller discussion
[29] Universities Association for Lifelong Learning (UK)

jointly created. In a series of modular workshops, I proposed management concepts which the practitioners critically evaluated against their own practices, collectively producing new enriched concepts. I captured and re-formulated this knowledge flow through facilitated group discussions, thereby creating a new body of living theory based in practice (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) that could be both applied and tested in participants' work situations and also tested against my own academic theories. Thus in partnership, we formed new knowledge domains that were both academic and practice–based, shown in the extracts below on communication contexts from the two versions of the Certificate[30]:

Version 1: *"The contexts include formal/informal; group/individual; client/colleague; face-to-face/distance"*

Version 2: *" The context in which you communicate directly affects the style of effective communication. Initially, of course, you may communicate to groups or individuals, but the context could be:*

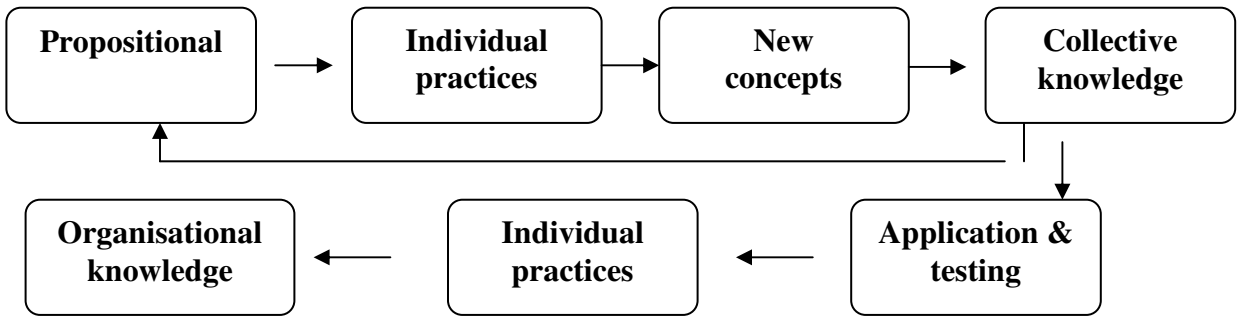
- *in formal settings such as board meetings, presentations, or interviews*
- *in informal settings with clients or colleagues during routine interactions*
- *at conscious, sub-conscious, and subliminal levels*

Common work-related communication contexts include:

- *face-to-face, interpersonal, distance, or virtual meetings*
- *during normal or crisis times*
- *corridor conferencing and work/social e.g.: over lunch, coffee, or drinks*
- *providing public information or marketing*
- *mentoring, appraisals, or supervisions*
- *mediation*
- *professional communities of practice, networks*

The academic/practitioner knowledge flow (shown in figure 10 below) was bi-directional: firstly *propositional* (academic and practice-based) knowledge was tested against individual practices, then *new concepts* were collectively developed into *collective knowledge* producing tradable academic assets (new Certificate and part Diploma), and individual/organisational knowledge and practices.

Figure 10 – Co-creating knowledge with the SMEs



[30] See appendices 9 &10 for the full versions of the original and updated Module 1

Co-created articulated knowledge was tested and validated in the two knowledge domains: in the academic domain through workshop discussions and assessed written assignments and awards[31], and also through university accreditation of the new Certificate/Diploma; and in the work domain through codification into spheres such as plans for new businesses, reorganisation of working methods, administrative, management or recruitment systems, or new marketing strategies. In this case, academic knowledge helped to articulate and test existing professional knowledge and competence and was itself tested and enhanced in the new collective knowledge domain of theory and practice, indicating a potential new role for the university that I discuss further in chapter five.

Whilst my experience of collaborative knowledge creation emerged in large part from my work with the SME managers, this was a more linear process than that of facilitating the DEWBLAM development of the common work based learning platform.

What is the common European work based learning platform?

The common European work based learning platform is an ambitious attempt to define common concepts and key features of work based learning in the European educational and social context. It is both theoretical and practical, emerging from the partners' understandings and from new practices as elements of the platform were applied in pilot programmes. It aimed not only to conceptualise work based learning and to give guidance to partners on the implementation of work based programmes but was also intended at project end as a guide for other interested institutions and to provide a baseline of work based theory and practice that could contribute to European protocols. The development process was challenging and often contested, as the platform aimed to be collaborative and incorporate only those features of work based learning that could be identified and agreed as core, common, and European, and not those pertaining to individual contexts.

My role has been pivotal - firstly to conceptualise the platform, then to facilitate, structure, and make sense of the collective emerging knowledge interpreting these into a set of common work based learning features. As I wrote the platform, inevitably the first versions represented the Middlesex wbl practice, but partners' emerging understandings and practices gradually altered the focus. I edited the contributions, made via the community web site and through workshops, seeking always to identify core and common features, rather than incorporate those that related to specific programmes or practices. However, the final definition of work based learning was agreed at an informal meeting that I was not able to attend, and, therefore, reflects more the conceptualisation and practice of vocational competence rather than a broader open-ended definition that I would have preferred.

This emphasis on competence development was due to several factors. Firstly, a dual vocational/academic educational system from secondary school to university level has

[31] For example, participants stated that their organisations had improved structures after the certificate – see also appendix 11 for Diploma feedback sheets

traditionally coexisted across Europe, which may have contributed to pre-understanding of work based learning as work-training for apprentices, or as work placements for students applying their school/college-acquired knowledge. Secondly, with the new focus of the EU on the competitive knowledge society, practice based knowledge is becoming more valued within European discourses, but this is understood as competence or job-related skills. Thirdly, the whole concept of wbl was new to the majority of the partners, and, therefore, a discourse of wbl as a knowledge creation system was perhaps too complex to comprehend. Finally, it may simply have been the case that job-related competences/skills programmes are potentially easier to sell to businesses.

Analysis of the common European work based learning platform

The eighth and final version of the platform has now been published two years after it was initiated, bringing together different understandings - from those based in practice (Lille); in theory and practice (Middlesex); in limited practice (Granada, Limburg); and those emerging from participating in the project or in other European projects such as ECTS or Tuning (Florence, Aachen, Abo, Bellinzona).

For reasons of permitted word count, I have selected for analysis the first two key sections only – the definitions of work based learning and the distinctive features of wbl in HET from versions 1 through 8. The table in figure 11 chronologically details the wbl definitions, whilst figure 12 presents the distinctive features of wbl. Both are followed by critical analysis.

The remaining sections of the platform delineate the role of partnership, pre-conditions, and requirements to develop a wbl approach, and the key features and structures of developing a programme. Subsequently, on platform completion, detailed guidelines of how to develop wbl programmes were added. Full platform versions are in appendix 12.

Figure 11 – Definitions of work based learning

Version	Definitions of work based learning
1	Wbl can be defined as learning at, through, and for work.
2	Wbl can be defined as learning at, through, and for work.
3	**1.** Wbl can be defined as learning that occurs and is acquired at, through, and for work. **2.** Wbl enables formal academic recognition and enhancement of personal, professional competence, knowledge, and experience. **3.** Wbl approaches or programmes can transform tacit personal knowledge to explicit, personal, and organisational intellectual capital.
4	**1.** Wbl can be defined as learning that occurs and is acquired at, through,

	and for work. **2.** Wbl enables formal academic recognition and enhancement of personal, professional competence, knowledge, and experience. **3.** Wbl approaches or programmes can transform tacit personal knowledge to explicit, personal, and organisational intellectual capital. **4.** Wbl is an experience based learning matrix, combining formal learning[32] (education and formation), informal learning and non-formal learning, which is assessed in the process and integrated in the explicit personal and social capital of the trainee. As a result of this assessment, the sum total of these learning activities will lead to certification.
5	**1.** Wbl can be defined as learning that occurs and is acquired at, through, and for work. **2.** Wbl enables formal academic recognition and enhancement of personal, professional competence, knowledge, and experience. **3.** Wbl approaches or programmes can transform tacit personal knowledge to explicit, personal and organisational intellectual capital. **4.** Wbl is a matrix combining formal learning acquired through education or training, informal and non-formal learning, that can be assessed and integrated into the explicit personal and social capital of the learner.
6	**1.** Wbl can be defined as learning that occurs and is acquired at, through, and for work. **2.** Wbl is a matrix combining formal learning acquired through education or training, informal and non-formal learning, that can be assessed and integrated into the explicit personal and social capital of the learner. **3.** Wbl enables sustainable higher education that is highly responsive both to the social demands of continuing education and to emerging areas of trans-disciplinary knowledge: • providing educational opportunities to adult learners enhancing and facilitating continuing professional development (CPD) • providing benefits for or meeting the strategic objectives of companies, public and private institutions, and organisations • strengthening innovation in HE organisations and policies in the perspective of lifelong learning
7	**1.** Wbl can be defined in this context as experiential learning leading to

[32] **Formal learning** – usually takes place in schools, universities, or training institutions and leads to a diploma or certificate.
Non-formal learning – includes free adult education within study circles, projects, or discussion groups, advancing at their own pace with no examination at the end.
Informal learning – can be found everywhere e.g.: in families, in the work place, in NGOs, in theatre groups, or can also refer to individual activities at home, like reading a book
Definitions taken from the Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013: Glossary
http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/glossary en.html

	the acquisition of competences or qualifications at levels 6, 7, and 8 of the European Qualifications framework (EQF). **2.** Wbl is a matrix combining formal learning acquired through education or training, informal and non-formal learning, that can be assessed and integrated into the explicit personal and social capital of the learner. **3.** Wbl enables sustainable higher education that is highly responsive to the social demands of dynamic labour markets, lifelong learning, and to emerging areas of trans-disciplinary knowledge: • providing educational and research opportunities to adult learners, thereby enhancing and facilitating continuing professional development (CPD) • representing added value that provides benefits for or meets the strategic objectives of companies, public and private institutions, and organisations • strengthening innovation in HE organisations and policies in the perspective of lifelong learning
8	**1.**Work based learning is an educational and training approach in which competence development is given a central position, and in which prior and experiential learning, formal learning, informal learning, and non-formal learning complement each other in the progress towards formal recognised and accredited qualification by the HET institution. **2.** Work based learning is an experience- centred teaching and learning approach in which the learner will develop competencies in multiple contexts, especially in the work place and because of the work place. The learner undertakes a theoretical, (applied) scientific project which is essential and relevant for study and work environments. **3.** Work based learning takes place in a context of structured partnerships and environments and brings about a definite added/surplus value and social capital for all parties involved, namely the workplace, the HET institution, and the learner. All three parties share equal responsibilities in the learning process which engages learners of all kinds in structured learning programmes designed, agreed upon and supported by the three parties and managed by the HET institution. The process lies in the hands of the learner, which entails the fact that s/he is responsible for the own learning experience and the ensuing transition. A reflexive approach and attitude is a fundamental concept in the personal competence development process.

The definition of work based learning, commencing from a simple statement in the first version, has undoubtedly been enriched, contextualised, and enhanced by the final version. But is it necessarily a reflection of what experienced UK practitioners might consider wbl to be in higher education and have the essential elements of work as a context and an enabler been lost? What is the role of knowledge in the final definitions or

is work based learning seen here as an arena where learning is "taught" and is merely instrumental in acquiring a predefined set of competences and gaining a qualification?

In the UK, the term "work based learning" is employed in a variety of ways to cover a range of learning levels, meanings, and contexts – from vocational training based partially or fully in the work place that may use National Occupational Standards (NOS) to enhance professional development or provide CPD[33] courses, NVQs[34] or foundation degrees; through student internships or work placements that may use the work place as a medium for teaching or supporting part of a set curriculum; to programmes that offer partial or full high-level learning opportunities to participants based around their work contexts. Whichever interpretation is used, wbl is certainly part of the new agenda for economic relevance in higher education[35].

Brennan (2005:4) proposes the notion that the curriculum of work based learning in higher education entails learning that is identified and demonstrated through activities occurring in the workplace, that is not taught on campus, nor restricted to narrow performance-related learning (such as in the NVQ system), nor to preparation for employment. Garnett (2004)[36] emphasises the focus of high-level critical thinking on work in order to facilitate the recognition, acquisition, and application of individual and collective knowledge, skills, and abilities and to achieve outcomes of significance to the learner, their work, and the university. These two notions contribute to broader understandings and practices of work based learning in higher education, referred to, for example, by Brennan and Little (1996) or Boud and Solomon (2001), whilst Connor (2005) posits a contrasting view that focuses on gaining knowledge and competencies in the workplace and, in this sense, is closer to the DEWBLAM definitions.

The philosophical grounding of the Middlesex University approach in viewing work based learning as a field of study (Portwood and Costley, eds. 2000), rather than as a new mode of "transmitting university-based learning to the work place" (Garnett, 2005: 80), potentially validates any learning occurring in any place of work, lifting it to comparability with academic research and learning and thereby creating a "professional researcher/learner" who might be based either in an organisation or in a university. It is this openness that contributes to the success of the Middlesex model of work based learning, and it is precisely the narrowness of the DEWBLAM propositions that cause me such unease.

The eight versions of the platform definitions trace emerging understandings of work based learning, its applicability, and its relevance to European discourses of new HE frameworks (for example in version 7). Versions 1/2 have been in use at Middlesex; versions 3-6 unpick and elaborate the brief definition, focusing on distinctive features and applications and framing these within European discourse[37]; version 7 loses the definition

[33] Continuing Professional Development
[34] National Vocational Qualifications
[35] See chapter 5 for a fuller discussion
[36] In inaugural lecture
[37] For example: "formal, informal, non-formal learning" *or* "personal and social capital"

of learning at, through, and for work, beginning to focus on qualification frameworks for political reasons[38] and funding parameters, whilst the final version impoverishes and narrows work based learning into an "educational and training approach" where competence development is central. The processes of developing the platform have been discussed above, but it is interesting to note that versions 1-6 were written via e-contributions, version 7 was negotiated in a workshop, whilst version 8 emanated from the Limburg pilot experience and was agreed in a meeting at which not all partners were present, thus ensuring that the European focus on competence was pre-eminent.

Critical analysis of these definitions against current thinking and practices of work based learning as posited above points to reductionism and instrumentalism, where any concept of the role of knowledge as key to learning has been lost, and where learning based at work is seen merely as an approach or mode of teaching and learning in order to acquire/develop pre-defined competencies – rather than recognising that work *engenders* learning. Such definitions refer to earlier educational positions where learning was only recognised when matching a prescribed set of course outcomes and denigrates the possibility that high-level learning is already present in the work place and may need explicating and validating, rather than adding to by "training or courses".

This focus on vocational competence acquisition is pre-eminent in new European higher education discourses, exemplified by the types of programmes that the DEWBLAM partners began to pilot and also by a recent Swiss proposal[39] for a national postgraduate diploma for APEL specialists. This has singularly failed to include work based learning elements, and has fore-grounded the use of APEL as an educational - not as a learning tool - that indicates pathways into vocational training[40]. Perhaps experienced UK practitioners need to engage more with forums across Europe to ensure that learning and knowledge based at work achieve higher status and wider understanding and recognition.

The distinctive features of work based learning (figure 12) underwent a similar transformative and partially reductionist process:

Figure 12 – Distinctive features of work based learning

Version	Distinctive features of work based learning
1	**1.** A wbl programme is derived from the needs of the work place and of the learner, rather than exclusively controlled by a disciplinary curriculum. **2.** A partnership between learner, university and employer (or other body such as a funder or professional institution) is negotiated and leads to a

[38] Project outcomes needed to be framed within official EU developments as discussed in chapter 1
[39] Developed by the Istituto Universitario Federale per la Formazione Professionale – an associate of the FSEA - DEWBLAM partner
[40] See appendix 13 for the proposed Swiss Diploma and appendix 14 p.5 for my critique given during the IFFP seminar in Lugano, May 2007

	learning agreement. **3.** The starting point and level of the programme is established through a structured review and evaluation of current learning, including the use of APL/APEL as appropriate. **4.** The programme aims at enhancing the participant's competence, knowledge base and professional practice. **5.** The programme aims at providing significant benefits to the sponsoring organisation **6.** Emerging theories are tested in the work place and new knowledge is created, or applied in a new way. **7.** Critical reflection is an essential component throughout the entire programme enabling the learner to develop by learning through reflective actions. **8.** A significant element of the programme incorporates a work based project that meets the needs of all stakeholders in the learning agreement. **9.** The educational institution assesses the learning outcomes of the negotiated programme within a trans-disciplinary framework of standards and levels, and formally recognises the learning through an award. **10.** Programmes generally consist of a combination of: • a learning review • a learning agreement • learning (content based) modules • work based projects • learner support • assessment for academic recognition
2	**1.** A wbl programme is derived from the needs of the work place and of the learner, rather than exclusively controlled by a disciplinary curriculum. **2.** A partnership between learner, university and employer (or other body such as a funder or professional institution) is negotiated and leads to a three-parties learning agreement. **3**. The programme aims: • at enhancing the participant's competence, knowledge base and professional practice • providing significant benefits to the supporting company, organisation or institution • the starting point and level of the process of learning is established through a structured review, evaluation and assessment of current learning, including the use of APL/APEL as appropriate. **4.** The learning process is based on a "blended learning" methodology including a variety of forms of learning and teaching characterised by: • critical reflection and reflective actions linking emerging theories to work experience

	• a work based project that meets the needs of all stakeholders in the learning agreement • individual support given to the learner by both the educational institution and the workplace organisation **5.** Learning performances and outcomes are defined in the framework of the European credit accumulation and transfer system. **6.** The educational institution assesses the learning outcomes of the negotiated programme within a trans-disciplinary framework of standards and levels, and formally certifies the learning through an award. **7.** Programmes generally consist of a combination of: • a learning review • assessment for academic recognition • a learning agreement • (content based) teaching modules, e-learning etc. • work based project(s) • learner support
3	**1.**Wbl requires a partnership negotiated between key stakeholders such as employers, learners and academic institutions. **2**.Wbl approaches recognise and accredit previous learning and experiences, howsoever acquired, through APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) and APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) processes and learning reviews, and can lead to partial or full HE awards if sufficient competency is proven. **3.**Wbl contributes to, and enhances continuing professional development (CPD) and lifelong learning. **4.** Wbl approaches and programmes aim at enhancing the participant's knowledge base, competency and professional practice, and at providing significant benefits for, or meeting the strategic objectives of, the sponsoring organisation. **5.** Learning performance and outcomes are defined in the framework of the European credit accumulation and transfer system (ECAS, ECTS). 6. The HE institution assesses the learning outcomes of the negotiated programme within a trans-disciplinary framework of standards and levels, and formally certifies the learning through an award, linked to European frameworks.
4	Wbl requires a partnership negotiated between key stakeholders such as employers, learners and academic or adult learning institutions. **2**.Wbl approaches recognise and accredit previous learning and experiences, howsoever acquired, through APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning) and APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) processes and learning reviews, and can lead to partial or full HE awards if sufficient competency is proven. **3.**Wbl contributes to, enhances and facilitates continuing professional development (CPD) and lifelong learning. **4.** Wbl approaches and programmes aim at enhancing the participant's

	knowledge base, competency and professional practice, and at providing significant benefits for, or meeting the strategic objectives of, the sponsoring organisation. **5.** Learning performance and outcomes are defined in the framework of the European credit accumulation and transfer system (ECAS, ECTS). **6.** The HE institution assesses the learning outcomes of the negotiated programme within a trans-disciplinary framework of standards and levels, and formally certifies the learning through an award, in accordance with the Dublin descriptors and the HEQF. **7.** The HE institution certifies acquired competencies and ensuing learning outcomes, ensuring that the level of these competencies equals those of comparable study programmes **8.** Beneficiaries are: • adult learners who have hitherto been excluded form academic education due to the impossibility of combining learning activities with professional commitments • adults with qualified work experiences without formal access authorisation for academic education • socially unprivileged adults due to gender, age, ethnicity, mobility • institutional beneficiaries – enterprises, public and private institutions, organisations
5	**1.** Wbl requires a partnership negotiated between key stakeholders such as employers, learners and academic or adult education institutions. **2.** Wbl approaches recognise and accredit previous learning and experiences, howsoever acquired, through APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) processes and learning reviews, and can lead to partial or full HE awards if sufficient competency is proven. **3.** Wbl contributes to, enhances and facilitates continuing professional development (CPD) and lifelong learning. **4.** Wbl approaches and programmes aim at enhancing the participant's knowledge base, competency and professional practice, and at providing significant benefits for, or meeting the strategic objectives of, the sponsoring organisation. **5.** Learning performance and outcomes are defined in the framework of the European credit accumulation and transfer systems (ECAS, ECTS, ECVET). **6.**The HE institution assesses the learning outcomes of the negotiated programme within a trans-disciplinary framework of standards and levels, and formally certifies the learning through an award, in accordance with the Dublin Descriptors and the EQF. **7.** The HE institution certifies competencies and learning outcomes acquired, ensuring that the levels equal those of comparable study programmes and awards a suitable qualification. **8.** Wbl enables sustainable university education by offering innovative

	and attractive learning systems that are highly responsive both to the social demands of continuing education and to emerging areas of trans-disciplinary knowledge.
6	**1.** WBL requires a partnership negotiated between key stakeholders, especially between employers, learners and academic or adult education institutions. **2.** WBL approaches and programmes enable formal academic recognition and accreditation of previous learning and experiences, howsoever acquired, through APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) processes and learning reviews • transforming tacit personal knowledge into explicit, personal and organisational intellectual capital, • thus enhancing the participant's personal professional competence, knowledge and practice **3.** WBL programmes offer innovative and attractive learning systems based on a "blended learning" methodology, including a variety of forms of learning and teaching characterised by: • critical reflection and reflective actions linking emerging theories to work experience • a work based project that meets the needs of all stakeholders in the learning agreement • distance learning and e-learning methodologies and techniques • individual support given to the learner by both the educational institution and the workplace organisation. **4.** The HE institution assesses the learning performance and outcomes of the negotiated programme in the framework of the European credit accumulation and transfer systems, referring to a trans-disciplinary framework of standards and levels (Dublin Descriptors, EQF), and formally certifies the learning through an award.
7	**1.** WBL requires a partnership negotiated between key stakeholders, such as employers, learners and academic or adult education institutions. **2.** WBL approaches and programmes include formal academic recognition and accreditation of previous learning and experiences, howsoever acquired, through APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) processes and learning reviews • transforming tacit personal knowledge into explicit, personal and organisational intellectual capital, • enhancing the participant's personal professional competence, knowledge and practice **3.** WBL programmes offer innovative and attractive learning systems based on a "blended learning" methodology, including a variety of forms

	of learning and teaching characterised by: • critical reflection and reflective actions linking emerging theories to work experience • a work based project that meets the needs of all stakeholders in the learning agreement • distance learning and e-learning methodologies and techniques • individual support given to the learner by both the educational institution and the workplace organisation. **4.** The HE institution assesses the learning performance, learning outcomes and competences of the negotiated programme and formally certifies the learning through an award.
8	**1.** Work based learning enables sustainable higher education that is highly responsive to the social demands of dynamic labour markets, lifelong learning and emerging areas of trans-disciplinary knowledge: • providing educational and research opportunities to adult learners, thereby enhancing and facilitating continuing professional development (CPD) • representing added value that provides benefits for, or meets the strategic objectives of companies, public and private institutions and organisations • strengthening innovations in HET organisations and policies in the perspective of lifelong learning **2.** WBL requires a partnership negotiated between key stakeholders, such as employers, learners and higher education institutions and/or adult education institutions. **3.** WBL approaches and programmes include formal academic recognition and accreditation of previous learning and experiences, howsoever acquired, through APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning), APEL (Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning) processes and learning reviews • transforming tacit personal knowledge into explicit, personal and organisational intellectual capital, • enhancing the participant's personal professional competence, knowledge and practice **4.** WBL programmes offer innovative and attractive learning systems based on a "blended learning" methodology, including a variety of forms of learning and teaching characterised by: • critical reflection and reflective actions linking emerging theories to work experience • a work based project that meets the needs of all stakeholders and is negotiated in the learning agreement • distance learning and e-learning methodologies and techniques • individual support given to the learner by both the educational institution and the workplace organisation.

	5. The HET institution assesses the learning performance, competences and learning outcomes of the WBL programme, and formally certifies the learning through an award at EQF level 6, 7, and 8 (Bachelor, Master and PhD).

A significant elimination from version 1 altered the platform focus from wbl programmes that are "derived from the needs of the work place and of the learner and not exclusively controlled by a disciplinary curriculum" to enabling "sustainable higher education that is highly responsive to social demands" providing benefits for learners and organisations, opportunities for education and research, and "strengthening innovation in HET institutions" by version 8.

This crucial refocusing reinforces the position of universities as controllers of higher level learning, with the work place as a junior partner offering a site for knowledge reception and where the learner acts as a conduit between the two. Two key issues of politics and dominant discourse emerge here - firstly, relegating the work place to a secondary position where HEIs provide the learning opportunities denigrates work as an independent site of knowledge but politically justifies the continuation of universities' pre-eminence in knowledge ownership, thus playing to the expressed concerns of academics in several partner institutions, as previously discussed. Secondly, notions of competence and social demands/benefits are framed within European discourses on lifelong learning, and it is noteworthy that the DEWBLAM partners initiated pilot wbl programmes that are pragmatic and responsive to perceived economic demands but that also maintained control of the learning agenda within the institution. Again, as with the wbl definitions, these notions are being placed at the core of higher education discourses in Europe and, as advanced wbl practitioners, we need to ensure that these discourses expand to encompass work as an equal site of learning and knowledge.

Comparing the distinctive features of the European platform with, for example, those defined by Boud and Solomon (2001)[41], the first version that I wrote is closely aligned in respect of partnership, the derivation of wbl programmes from work needs, establishment of starting points, use of projects, and assessment of learning outcomes - although benefits and critical reflection are additional in the platform. However, later collaborative versions build on this to add the transformation of personal knowledge into intellectual capital, blended learning methodologies, and learner support. Redefining knowledge as it emerged from diverse new practical applications and theoretical understandings and synthesising this into the platform in terms that were acceptable to the new critical community of European wbl practitioners, signified the establishment of a modified paradigm that has been both added to and concomitantly impoverished. In European terms, the platform and pilots are at the leading edge of practice, and although at times my personal values and understanding conflicted with the partners', particularly over the

[41] Briefly, these are: a specific partnership between an organisation and an HEI; negotiated learning plans; programmes derived from needs of the workplace, and not controlled by disciplinary curriculum; programme starting point and level established after review & evaluation of learning; work based projects

narrowness of some of the definitions, I had to constantly engage in dialectical dialogue and ultimately accept the majority consensus in order to produce a document that better reflected our collective understandings and realities – and not just mine.

The application of the common European work based learning platform

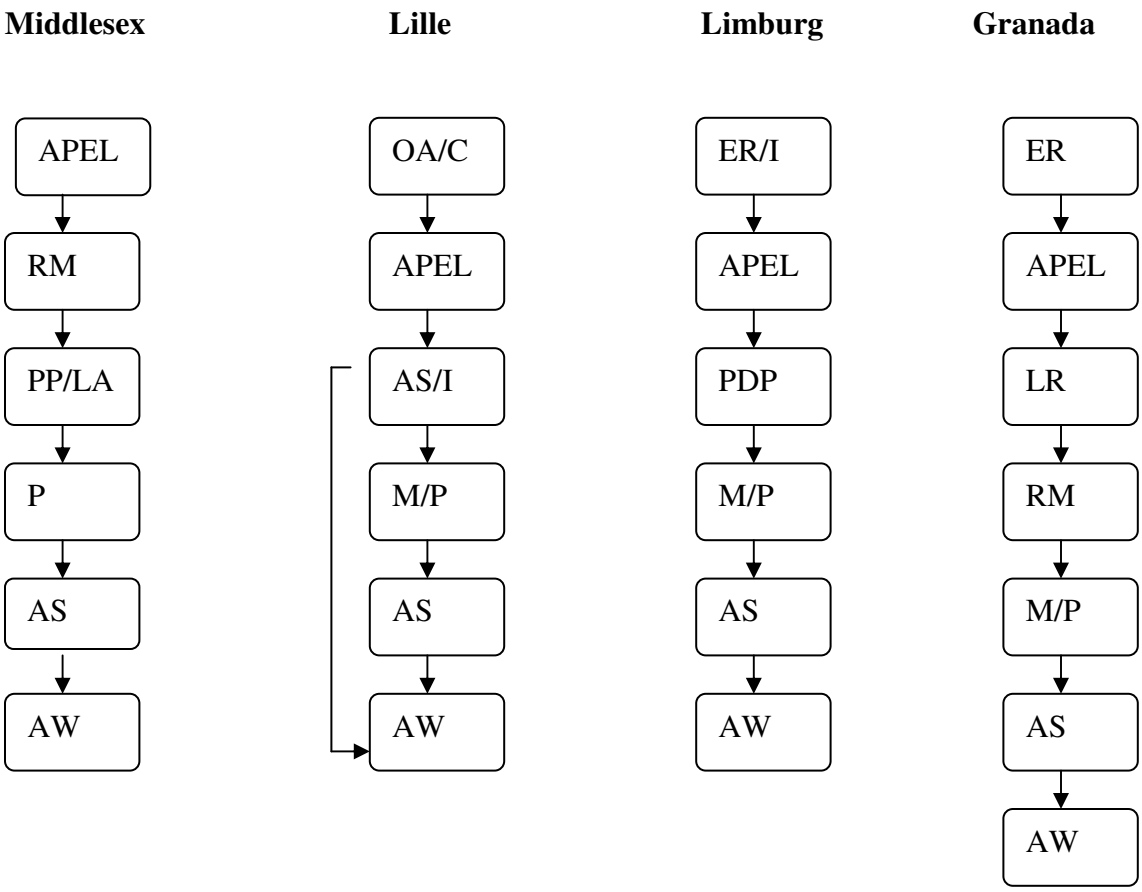
Due to partners' internal institutional or political difficulties, only Granada was able to develop a pilot programme drawing on the Lille and Middlesex models and on elements of the platform. This pilot experimented with a work based parallel option (taken by 2 learners in a group of over 30) within a taught programme and allowed accreditation of specific modules according to experience - it also included a research module similar to Middlesex.

Limburg commenced its pilot in the first year of the DEWBLAM project, strongly resembling the UK NVQ system in both its competency approach and types of assessment used, and only allowing part-exemption and entry to its mainstream programme through an APEL route. An initial self-evaluation tool is used to determine suitability, followed by an interview, a learning review portfolio for accreditation and part-exemption purposes, a personal action and development plan, a mix of on-campus modules and work based experiences, another portfolio, and a final wbl project.

Lille's existing programme requires a negotiated tripartite agreement before programme start between the university, the learner, and the organisation with clearly defined roles and contributions from each constituent member, closely linking the work place and the university where academic courses and organisational projects are meshed according to individual needs. Members of the organisation or relevant professional bodies and the university jointly conduct tutoring and formative and summative assessments. If the candidate meets award requirements once the APEL process is complete - which must include a contextualising plan or project - then they may be interviewed and assessed by a jury and awarded a qualification without needing to undertake a programme. This methodology has been used at Lille to award the national title of Ingénieur Diplômé par l'État to engineering technicians who have gained sufficient relevant experience over at least five years, although a national decree in 2002 reduced the minimum years of experience to three. The same decree opened accreditation/awards out to include private training and vocational institutions, thereby challenging the hegemony of universities that are now obliged to find new ways of engaging with learners and to redefine their own pedagogies and strategic objectives.

In figure 13 below, the comparative chart shows the structure of the wbl programmes operated at Middlesex, Lille, Limburg, and Granada:

Figure 13: Comparative chart of WBL programmes



Key

AS: Assessment

AW: Award

C: Contract

ER: Entrance requirement

I: Interview

L: Learning agreement

LR: Learning review

M: Module

OA: Organisational agreement

P: Project

PDP: Personal development/action plan

PP: Programme plan

RM: Research Methods

Middlesex programmes generally permit an APEL claim, require a tripartite agreement at the programme plan stage for individual learners, or an upfront bipartite agreement when collaborating with organisations, a research methods module and work based projects.

However, whilst Middlesex does not currently allow a full award via an APEL route on its under/post graduate programmes, it was able to draw on the Lille experiences and develop a pilot doctorate [42] that is a full award via an APEL route[43]. Despite being at the leading edge of work based practices, there is ample scope for Middlesex to review its own programmes and to consider approaches for individuals and organisations that enhance current uses of APL/APEL. Additionally, Middlesex could consider features such as professional competence; minimal entrance interviews that determine the suitability of learners for work based learning, and more integrated organisational/academic partnerships to develop new programmes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I identified and evaluated the complex processes of collaborative knowledge creation in the European partnership highlighting some of the tensions, and have shown how facilitating this process was made possible through previous experiences within the SME sector. I also presented and critically analysed the core definitions and features of the common European work based learning platform, indicating the significant trend in the European arena to focus on narrow interpretations of knowledge as competence, which I will further analyse in the next chapter.

[42] Doctorate in Professional Studies by Public Works

[43] Current Middlesex wbl programmes allow a maximum of 2/3 credits via APEL/APL

CHAPTER 5 – COMPETENCE AND KNOWLEDGE SITES

Introduction

This chapter analyses two key issues emerging from the critical analysis of the platform, focusing firstly on competence acquisition as opposed to validation of knowledge and learning, asking whether this indicates a dichotomy or whether there is an argument for mutuality resulting in competent knowledge; and, secondly, on the relationships of universities and the work place as sites of learning and knowledge.

Competence, knowledge or mutuality?

Academic knowledge is increasingly sublimated to the needs and demands of the market, marking the apparent paradigm shift of knowledge from mode 1 *science* to mode 2 k*nowledge production* (Gibbons et al, 1994). Mode 1 *science* epistemologies value knowledge and intellectual rigour that are "removed from the world of action, practice, and work" (Barnett, 2000:27); whilst mode 2 knowledge is trans-disciplinary in the sense that there are no strictly demarcated disciplines, it is heterogeneous, defined by quality systems and audits and can be created in eclectic partnerships constituted by academics, consultants, think tanks, or organisations (Scott 1997:23-25). Practice or work based learning fits within this paradigm, being unbounded by disciplines and tending towards the horizontal and thematic. Part of this subjective learning is often systemically bounded, managed, and exploited – particularly when it is already explicit in competent task-related skills and abilities - becoming organisational *procedural* or *propositional knowledge*. However, the rich heuristic knowledge that is developed by individuals in the course of their work when applying systemic knowledge also needs to be formalised and made available to the organisation as part of its capital (Tsoukas, 2005), and could potentially be added to an extant body of knowledge. One way of doing this is through focused work based programmes that initiate a process of reflective and critical analysis of tasks and learning, reaching beneath the surface of actions to understand and explicate the substantive knowledge and value bases that underpin the functional mechanisms of work processes.

In the UK, as higher education inexorably moves towards providing a curriculum that aims to meet the needs of employers and the economy, there has been a concomitant expansion of vocational courses such as foundation degrees or graduate apprenticeships and an increasing use of National Occupational Standards by professional institutions to benchmark HE programme accreditation and professional recognition (Roodhouse & Hemsworth, 2004). These standards are fairly narrow in concept and in usage[44] tending to notions of competence where knowledge is closely tied to task performance skills, and that often exclude the critical reflection and ability to create knowledge that denote high-

[44] Mainly through the National Vocational Qualifications system

level university learning. In this way, there seems to be an involuntary collusion by both vocational training institutions and universities in maintaining the polarity of academic and practice-based knowledge, and this needs to change in order to recognise and reflect the knowledge domains of both the work place and of the academy.

As intellectual domains are ever more affected by the drive of the knowledge economy towards educational massification and marketisation that provide workers "fit for purpose", particularly post-92 universities are responding through implementation of discourses such as learner-centredness, learning outcomes, credits, and competency; concomitantly, they have also been subjected to control mechanisms such as financial audit/reward schemes and the correlation of outcomes/outputs to the provision of research and other finance. The growth of work based learning programmes is part of this shift and, increasingly, as the DEWBLAM definitions and pilots have also demonstrated in the European arena, cognition is being substituted by instrumental and vocational practices – notions of competence - that focus on what learners can "do" in specific tasks, thus risking the loss of the reflective critical ability that is intrinsic to academic learning.

Boud and Garrick (1999) summarise the purposes of learning based at work as being of contributive benefit to the organisation for personal development and for social investment – but debates continue as to whether this learning constitutes valid knowledge. The notion of organisational benefit is supported by King (2007:28) who posits in a report into employer engagement with higher education that wbl programmes offered by universities should "be demand-led, delivered at a time and quantity that employers want (i.e., small chunks not courses) with learning outcomes linked to business performance outcomes". King also contends that higher educated managers are more likely to embrace change and that high-level *skills* are a "vital component to maintain a global trading position" (ibid:13). The focus here on *skills* and *outcomes/performance* fore-grounds competence as the principle means of measuring business success and competitiveness, excluding any role that high-level learning and knowledge might play. Whilst this focus is consonant with the DEWBLAM partners' pilots and understanding, there is an inherent one-sidedness implying that employees need to be "trained" by an institution and that intrinsic pre-existing personal or organisational knowledge is either irrelevant or has little value.

If the academy is often seen as the site of researched theoretical knowledge and the work place as its recipient, then employees that have been prepared for work by the university or other institutions of learning transfer and apply this acquired knowledge, gaining practical skills and competence in fulfilling specific tasks and functions. From both the university's and the organisation's perspectives, this denies the probability that work *is* already an independent locus of high-level learning and knowledge but may lack the requisite skills and systems required to explicitly codify, validate, or build on this knowledge - expert systems highly relevant to workers' needs that the university can potentially provide. A longstanding lack of perceived commonality in language describing needs (Connor, 2005) and lack of offer relevant to needs has also contributed to the continuing polarity between universities and organisations.

Maintaining, therefore, these distinct polarities in what constitutes learning – that is, the split between academic *theory* and practical work based *competence* –perhaps was one mechanism utilised by the partners in coming to terms with work based learning. Several DEWBLAM partners were engaged in internal antagonistic struggles between the more traditionalist mode 1 views of education and the emerging mode 2 work based learning reality, as noted previously in chapter three. Given this situation, perhaps the elevation of competence over validating knowledge emanating from the work place is more comprehensible. Additionally, particularly in Germany, an established system of vocational apprenticeships where skills and abilities are learnt at work pre-dates new concepts of university-level learning based at work, and this must also have influenced reasons for the insistence on competence as opposed to knowledge validation – despite having as partners both Lille and Middlesex with their advanced experience in work based learning. In the UK, work based practitioners or theoreticians may view these discourses with a sense of déjà-vu but as the discussions above demonstrate, competence for workforce development is also high on the political agenda here, and the academic community needs to become more vocal in expressing its concerns that learning should encompass knowledge as well as skills.

There is an argument here for mutuality, where work based competence and academic knowledge mutually generate or enhance knowledge and become meshed into what I term "*competent knowledge*". The general attitude of the SME managers I worked with corroborated King's (2007:1) contention that businesses were mainly interested in improving their performance and did not "relate (staff) learning to academically recognised levels", however, some post-course feedback comments (see appendix11) acknowledged that participants used newly-acquired reflective practice to improve their organisations. One of the notable success factors of the SME management competency programme was the use of guided, collective critical reflection on personal practice, enabling the surfacing and critiquing both of the learning and of the tacit and codified competent knowledge intrinsic to those practices, elevating this to an equal status with the proposed academic knowledge. The amalgamation of mode I academic science and mode 2 practical production through collective critical dialectics in the workshops[45] generated new knowledge, practices, products, and competences for the managers and for me (the facilitator) that was useful both for new mode 1 knowledge (rewritten modules) and for new mode 2 applications in the diverse work places. Both these types were thus reciprocally validated by the process itself and additionally validated by the university that accredited the new Certificate emerging from the process and recognised the practitioners' knowledge and competence through awards.

It is interesting to note that knowledge is assigned separate status and not subsumed within competence in the recent Bologna Process Communiqué (May, 2007) which is a progression from earlier ministerial communiqués where this *was* the case. European (and UK) agendas for educational change and employability propose that higher education programmes are fit for purpose and relevant to the emerging knowledge economy, assigning universities the role of "fostering social cohesion, reducing

[45] See chapter four for an example

inequalities and raising the level of knowledge, skills and competence in society" [46] in order to contribute to economic competitiveness. The Communiqué acknowledges that most countries are still at the early stages of developing flexible learning pathways and systems for recognising prior learning through credits and access – but this important statement opens and legitimises APEL beyond admission to courses and should serve to render APEL more widespread and acceptable within mainstream higher education. This represents a significant shift from the Bergen Communiqué of May 2005 that includes recognition of prior learning as "access to and as elements in higher education programmes", whilst acknowledging that much still remains to be done to implement flexible (and work based) learning systems. However, even more needs doing in order for work to be recognised as a valid *site* of knowledge generation rather than just as a *recipient* of knowledge transfer.

By implementing APEL procedures that echo longstanding UK practices in allowing entrance with advanced standing to prescribed university courses (Garnett, 2007), Granada and Limburg chose options that may seem limited in scope to sophisticated practitioners such as those at Middlesex University, but to inexperienced practitioners in untested landscapes, these may still be deemed to be radical and risky. However, the dual taught/work based pathways that Granada and Limburg have instituted, could benefit from practitioners' real world input avoiding inbuilt course knowledge obsolescence (Bourner & Katz, 2000:24) and creating competent knowledge practitioners as in the SME case - provided methodologies are found to mesh academic and practice-based knowledge.

The Tuning project (see appendix 8:4), in which the Belgian and German partners were engaged, emphasised competence development as the objective of developing subject-based programmes, defining competence as "a dynamic combination of attributes, abilities, and attitudes". Viewed within the earlier Bologna Process protocols of higher educational reform and alignment – which the Tuning project aimed to implement – the DEWBLAM partners' focus on competence at the expense of trans-disciplinary knowledge and validation is more resonant. However, as European discourse has moved on, the platform definitions of work based learning have remained tied to previous discourses, thus missing a valuable opportunity to be truly innovative.

The relationship of the university and the work place

A key concept emerging from this doctoral project indicates that in a post-modern environment, both universities and work organisations would benefit from a more symbiotic relationship – academic knowledge that is codified and theoretical could incorporate the procedural and propositional knowledge held by individuals and organisations, as highlighted in the SME programme example above. This notion has also been posited by Boud & Solomon (2001) who query existing boundaries of disciplinary and work based knowledge and challenge conceptions of universities' roles, proposing

[46] From the London Ministerial Communiqué on the Bologna Process, May 2007 - "Towards the European Higher Education Area: Responding to Challenges in a Globalised World – www.dfes.gov.uk/bologna

the alteration of power structures and of ownership of learning and knowledge, thereby opening the way to enable universities and organisations to become collaborators in knowledge generation.

However as these boundaries begin to elide (Scott, 1997), knowledge becomes increasingly commodified and the autonomy of the university and the role of academics could become existentialist issues – exemplified by the unease the DEWBLAM partners demonstrated in their singular failure to consider the work place as an independent and mature site of learning and to acknowledge European paradigm shifts in corporate cultural thinking that require codified knowledge to remain dynamic and capable of adaptation, and focus increasingly on the performance of individuals, organisations, regions and countries (Lundvall & Borras, 1999). Higher education programmes need to keep pace as knowledge epistemologies shift from rationality towards utility, and European work patterns tend towards models that are more project-oriented, problem-centred, practical and inter-disciplinary similar to those practised in the UK, away from paternalistic (France), role-oriented (Germany), or self-fulfilment (Sweden) models (Trompenaar, 1993).

With knowledge generation and validation increasingly occurring in work domains, the university needs to re-think its traditional role and perhaps redefine itself, as McNair (1997) suggests, as a locus of socially constructed knowledge where knowledge professionals (or symbolic analysts) solve problems and innovate new ideas. These figures could be co-located: firstly within universities as trans-disciplinary experts and facilitators/validators of knowledge; secondly at work as high-level critical thinkers and producers of knowledge. Both of these professionals would possess transferable and economically viable and desirable capabilities and could perhaps engineer a future new role as an *academic work practitioner* where knowledge stems as much from an academic body of knowledge as from the capability to analyse, interpret, assign meanings, innovate, and implement practices – in other words: fusion into *competent knowledge*.

Additionally, the university could act as a central accessible "bank" that legitimises, holds, invests in, and grows knowledge in collaborative partnership with industry and other sectors engaged in learning (such as professional or vocational institutes), instead of maintaining control of knowledge constructed in relation to courses. Centralisation of knowledge is important for economies of scale to avoid fragmentation and repetition, to identify strategic opportunities, and to build on what has come before but in new, innovative ways. For example, in such a system, a knowledge broker could be a "powerful agent for change….providing linkage and fluidity across a dispersed social system" (Cope 2000:155). Implementing such radical changes, however, would require a paradigm shift enabling universities to engage with work and markets in new dynamic ways, rather than continue in a static knowledge transfer approach.

There are examples of the university engaging with social partners, but this focuses more on validation of knowledge rather than on collaborative knowledge generation. The French system acknowledges the work place as a site of learning and Lille University has

forged close relationships with work organisations through the dual tutor system, developing joint programmes that meet the needs of those candidates who attain only partial accreditation (or knowledge validation) of their experience. Additionally, the deciding accreditation jury must include a competent organisational representative - although not from the candidate's own organisation.[47] However, there is still a requirement that the university not only provides courses to fill the gaps, but also that the student must physically attend these.

Whilst Middlesex University has a history of accrediting organisational competences (e.g.: Bovis, Marks & Spencer) and the generic work based programmes at Middlesex go a long way to recognising and validating the learning that occurs in the work place – this recognition remains on the university-terms, as all learners must present their written documentation in an academically acceptable format that meets a set of level criteria. Practitioners who are wholly competent and knowledgeable within their own spheres, however, are not always capable of meeting these set formats or of using academic language. Examples of this mismatch of competent knowledge and academic requirements were certainly present amongst many of the SME managers, whose only contact with the university lasted five days and was mediated through me; and examples can also be found amongst learners who are enrolled on full wbl degree programmes, have high-level status and knowledge, yet have difficulty in explicating their knowledge in the required academic format.

Universities need to look beyond their boundaries and validate their knowledge in the real world (Barnett, 2000) through enhanced partnership with the work place, thereby creating a more symbiotic and balanced relationship. Organisations and individuals often perceive universities as irrelevant to their learning needs because of a top-down model of teaching (or of knowledge transfer) that more closely resembles a school classroom, or because they are unresponsive to real work-focused practices and research needs. My own experience with the SME sector obliged me to immediately change a hierarchical tutor/student relationship when I discovered the level of pre-existing knowledge and expertise of course participants. If knowledge is *transferred*, inquiry and reflection can be impeded – transfer is not dialectical, it has inherent power structures of knowing and ignorance, it is linear and static and implies a unidirectional flow of information. Knowledge *transformation*, on the other hand, is a dynamic, multi-directional flow requiring more than one willing partner in action and can simultaneously encompass a variety of contexts. However, common discourse still holds that partnerships should transfer knowledge *to* the work place rather than transform it *within*.

With closer links to organisations, universities could use their professional research capability to help codify and enhance organisational explicit and heuristic knowledge and develop curricula and learning methodologies that are responsive and developmental. As sites of power shift, organisations, universities, and others, such as research bodies, all need to recognise the value that each site holds and engage with each other through complex understandings in an egalitarian "open world ontology" (Tsoukas, 2005:5).

[47] This is a requirement of the 2004 French national decree on higher education

Partial engagement or maintaining exclusive power over knowledge negates the intrinsic knowledgeability of all stakeholders, risking entrenchment or even irrelevance in an era of global change.

Nowotny *et al* (2004:93) suggest that the university needs to de-institutionalise as inside/outside boundaries no longer make sense in mode 2 knowledge production realities, and that it needs to adapt to new knowledge configurations and alliances in "synergistic activities" – a contention that support my findings of the urgent need to redefine work/academic relationships. Work based learning programmes do enable universities to be collaborators rather than competitors with organisations (Boud and Solomon 2001), and indeed the landscape that is beginning to take shape in Europe is one where market forces predominate and collaboration becomes essential for survival. In France, for example, legal and social frameworks already permit all training organisations and educational institutions which award recognised qualifications to accredit applicants' life and work experiences through APEL. In theory, if one institution refuses an award to an applicant with insufficient experience, another could take an opposing view and satisfy the client's demand, creating a situation of educational shopping *a la carte*, with obvious potential consequences for quality, knowledge, and learning. Global organisations have also already started to institute internal "universities", and in this new reality where boundaries between work and academic knowledge are eliding, universities must reposition themselves in order to remain key players in the field of knowledge. Innovative institutional attitudes and ability to implement change will increasingly decide the positions of universities as preferred partners in knowledge creation in the 21st century.

Renewing course materials in a "real-time, real-world" mode could also help to change the relationship of universities and work; however in order to achieve this, academic systems need to be simplified and mental models need to change to enable recognition of work based knowledge. In the case of the SME programmes, the depth and breadth of knowledge that the management practitioners implicitly held was distinctly superior in many instances to that which was proposed by the module content, and only needed to be made explicit, codified, and tested within the workshops and in the work place. At Middlesex University, despite over ten years of developing and using innovative work based learning methodologies, the general academic programme structure and supporting systems remain predicated on full-time students, posing limits on mature and experienced learners based at work. Additionally, these learners must take (and pass) certain mandatory modules in order to gain an award – however, the knowledge and competence they already possess is highly contextualised, relevant, and often specialised *beyond* academic knowledge and should, therefore, be appropriately recognised in a full APEL award.

A final note on the issue of relationships – all partners including Middlesex (that has physical or virtual attendance for tutorials) require learners to physically attend the university for learning modules. This serves to reinforce the notion that the *university* is the principal site of learning, relegating the work place to a secondary position where acquired learning is practised, and this power balance urgently needs to be redressed.

Conclusion

In the new knowledge economy in Europe and the UK, there is a continuing tendency to elevate learning acquired in a formal institutional setting above the knowledge found in the work place; conversely, competence is increasingly considered as more desirable and valuable than knowledge – reflecting the vocationalisation of higher education into skills delivery. Barnett (2000:29) calls for knowledge based in the work place to be "structurally reflexive" and scrutinised and reviewed by professionals and academics in order for knowledge to be recognised as such, but I have argued more radically in this chapter that knowledge (heuristic, propositional, and procedural) based in and emanating from the work place is already valid and valuable in its own right, and does not necessarily require scrutiny. Additionally, I proposed that academic and work based applied knowledge could be meshed into *competent knowledge*, thus reflecting the intrinsic value of both sites and sources of knowledge.

CHAPTER 6 – OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

My doctoral programme has been a long professional and personal journey – it has taken me from earlier beginnings as a management consultant with intuitive inclinations to using work based approaches in my training programmes, through academic practices grounded in the Middlesex University work based philosophy to new experiences in the European forum. The DEWBLAM project itself has been five years in the making – two in preparing the ground for the partnership and three in conducting it from inception to finale - and I am proud that I have personally contributed to launching work based learning perspectives, understandings, practices, and a community of practitioners across Europe.

This final chapter will draw together the salient points that have been analysed and the project outcomes generated; it will evaluate the contributions made to current debates on knowledge and work based practices that have been framed within new European realities and agendas for change; it will draw inferences from the case study relating these to wider applications and implications; it will review doctoral project aims against outcomes and consider the appropriateness of the selected methodology; it will enable me to reflect on my own learning and practice, measured against the doctoral level criteria; and finally, it will propose some recommendations in the light of this study.

The potential impact of DEWBLAM

DEWBLAM has the potential to impact significantly on local economies, on institutional educational philosophies and epistemologies, and on a new body of adult learners. Ultimately, it could also contribute to European discourses on higher education, as the work based learning theories and practices developed during the project begin to be implemented and embedded in the partner contexts.

Within localised economies, the partner higher education institutions might begin to refocus their programmes to more community-oriented ones that are adapted to local needs and are developed in partnership with a range of industry and social stakeholders – drawing on the models developed by Limburg and Granada or utilised at Lille where programmes are tailored to fit specific professional profiles or it is possible to gain an award through APEL. The Middlesex partnership models also offer a baseline for new programme development – for example, the frameworks of organisational courses or core competency accreditation + negotiated university programme or vocational courses (or CPD) + bridging modules + HE programme.
Partnership enables knowledge and learning acquired outside the academy to be recognised, valued, and incorporated into higher education systems, helping to codify and transform knowledge. However, the interrelationships between formal/informal learning

and work/university need to be carefully negotiated in order for power to be equitably distributed between learners, employers, and universities. This would enable the learner to significantly change capability and understanding through a mix of formal/non-formal/informal learning that include cognitive and decision-making processes, as well as implicit/explicit knowledge and individual/social learning (Eraut, 2000). One possible way of achieving a more balanced relationship is indicated in the SME example where the academic propositional knowledge provided the impetus for situated knowledge creation *together* with practitioners in the workshops, affirming and enhancing both the managers' and the facilitator's practices. For adult learners, DEWBLAM pilots could offer new opportunities for lifelong learning and the possible validation of existing learning, ensuring employability and supporting the European social model that aims to "find a balance between economic and social objectives" (Nyhan et al, 2003:30).

Many of the tensions of the DEWBLAM project lay in contradictions between the theoretical and the political dimensions of learning (analysed in chapters 1, 3, 4, & 5) and in confrontations between formally constructed learning and informal knowledge located in the work place. Colley et al (2003) advocate that both formal and informal learning should be seen as present and interrelated in all learning situations thus avoiding claims that one is superior to the other. This supports my argument for mutuality, however, as I noted in chapter five, universities tend to maintain control of knowledge by validation procedures (such as APEL), thereby implying that informally acquired learning and knowledge are only valid once they have been formally recognised by a university, rather than valid in their own right.

There is no doubt that instrumentalisation of learning is occurring in the macro-political dimension of the European knowledge economy through theoretical rhetoric and practical protocols as discussed throughout this doctoral project, and also at local and institutional levels exemplified by the DEWBLAM pilots that closely relate learning to narrowly-defined outcomes of job-related competences. Despite this premise, the intellectual capital that the DEWBLAM project has produced contributes significantly to the European learning and knowledge economy in the form of knowledge capital (platform and guidelines) and structural capital through transformation into institutional systems or pilot programmes (Barnett, 2000; Edvinsson & Malone, 1998). There is an argument here for the formal codification of knowledge into useable products, systems, or assets - tacit or theoretical knowledge, however interesting or relevant, is much more significant when embedded in practice where it both informs practice and is itself further informed through use and application (see chapter four for an example on the SME knowledge creation process). The university could assume an important expert role in the process of formal codification, provided it is prepared to recognise the equipollence of work based knowledge to its own knowledge sources within a common knowledge domain.

When the partners were asked to identify the impact that DEWBLAM would have on Europe (see appendix 7), responses varied from "an important contribution to the Bologna Process; a role model; sharing and growing knowledge without systems barriers" to "no impact so far", although this was qualified by indicating that the common wbl platform could be an "important standard framework". Additionally, with the

accession of Eastern European countries whose recent state-dominated economic and social models differ substantially from Western Europe, DEWBLAM presents a model for new EU members to draw on, concomitantly offering opportunities for innovation as embedded traditional, rational, and linear higher education models confront postmodernist methodologies.

The role of partnership

The DEWBLAM project was conceived as a partnership in order to develop work based learning concepts and pilot programmes, but partnerships are bound in power dynamics. They are often multi-dimensional, functioning individual-to-individual, individual to own organisation/other organisations, and organisation-to-organisation, and relationships can be either hierarchical or more democratic. In this project, we agreed at the outset to use a democratic approach to decision making, and in the project outline we had already conceived collaboration as integral to the process of creating knowledge. The power dynamics were initially unequal – starting from the premise of having a senior partner and founder (Middlesex) on the basis of experience - however, by project end, these had equalised (see chapter 3).

The knowledge created within this partnership is rich and diverse and much more meaningful and substantial than a single individual alone could have generated. However, given the diversity of the constituent members, a more coherent coordination and increased academic representation might have helped to codify the knowledge at an earlier stage and, thereby, enable the earlier growth of experience and the implementation of more pilot programmes. The knowledge that was generated in the single partner situations was only partially and sporadically made explicit in the collective "ba" – generally during the six-monthly meetings with some use of the website. A significant proportion of project time was taken over conducting operational project business – most of the academics were single representatives and needed to focus on the weighty European Union project reporting, as well as on developing work based theory and practices, whilst administrative representatives may have dealt better with the reports but lacked academic expertise. A clear strategic map[48] and more transparent systems that linked the coordinating centre more closely to events in different situations, together with separate project administrators and academics in each institution, would have been helpful.

Contribution to knowledge

DEWBLAM has made significant contributions to the understanding of work based learning epistemologies and practices in Europe: firstly enabling individual participants to gain theoretical understanding and to grow as practitioners and pathfinders within their

[48] See figure 7 on page 28

own institutions; secondly, the development of the common European work based learning platform and guidelines represents a standard and a pathfinder that is innovative in the European context. Six HE institutions in six partner countries have, or will implement wbl pilots that are completely innovative in their contexts - causing profound and lasting impact not only on the institutions concerned and their direct social partners but also on local and, perhaps, eventually on national educational systems. The implications of DEWBLAM as an educational development project that contributes to new paradigms of adult learning can only be surmised here, but it is likely that the partner institutions might be viewed as and become innovators at the leading edge of professional education within new communities of practice. They would be able to engage with others in higher education institutions who are looking to implement innovative learning methodologies, and who may wish to develop work based learning programmes as part of their offer to adult learners within current discourses of lifelong learning. The European Commission is currently evaluating the DEWBLAM project outcomes, but there is no doubt that the partnership has raised the profile of work based learning in European higher education with possible snowball effects as more HEIs and organisations become aware of the potential benefits.

The knowledge/competency polarity will no doubt continue as economic and social drivers enforce the European skills agenda[49] - but both academic and organisational practitioners need to voice their concerns that the extensive situated knowledge in the work place has a vital and significant role in learning and should not be sidelined. I have argued that knowledge is becoming subsumed within the focus on competency to the impoverishment of individuals, of work and ultimately of extant bodies of knowledge – coining the concept of *competent knowledge* to represent the amalgamation of existing and new theory/practice-based knowledge that can equally be work based or academic within joint knowledge domains (see chapters 4 & 5). The trend towards skills competence can be seen in the increasing vocationalisation of higher education programmes across Europe, in the UK in significant funding of further education and in current European Commission consultations on mobility and compatibility between vocational[50] and higher education credit systems – indeed the term "vocational education and training (VET)" was deliberately included in the DEWBLAM platform title. Whilst organisations may have key concerns that jobs are carried out with maximum efficiency to the detriment of knowledge acquisition, universities could rebalance this focus, contributing their expertise in knowledge.

The concept of *competent knowledge* emerged initially through my engagement with the SME managers (see chapter 4) who already had knowledge and experience deriving from the work place, but wanted confirmation from the university that their practice measured well against benchmark standards of practice and theory and also wanted to fill any potential knowledge gaps, or to solve specific management problems they might have. The workshops I facilitated encouraged participants to reflect on their practice and share their experiences, examining their tacit and applied knowledge in a non-threatening

[49] For example in discourses on: social cohesion, social mobility, employability, global competitiveness
[50] ECVET - European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training – for information see www.ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/ecvt2005_en.pdf

forum that led to "self assessment and discovery…recognising qualities I have, and re-evaluating the bigger picture…gaining ideas from others and helping fine-tune what we (already) do…gave me a sense of purpose and understanding of my role…"[51]. This process of collective reflection surfaced participants' knowledge and meshed with academic and work based theory, leading to codification and enhancement of practice.

To arrive at *competent knowledge*, however, there is no pre-requisite to attend a physical or virtual workshop, although there is much to be gained by interactions. Through the lens of critical reflection, work based knowledge and practices need to be surfaced, benchmarked against current thinking - where they may be found to be lacking, or similar, or innovative - meshed with other theory and practice, and applied and evaluated directly in the work place through individual and organisational practice. I suggest that the role of the university can be crucial here in stimulating and managing the meshing process, providing for example:

- primary and secondary research theories and exemplar applications
- subject discipline-based knowledge
- knowledge banks that collect/manage knowledge from all possible sources
- tools for critical reflection
- learning environments (or "bas") that can be used for knowledge exchanges, guided learning, or qualifications

Knowledge could then flow freely in multi-directions – for example, between organisations, universities, research institutions, individuals, communities of practice – enabling each knowledge holder to cross current borders (Barnett, 2000) and engage in meaningful regenerative dialogue and knowledge creation within new domains. This would entail an entirely new function and purpose for universities in the adult education market, but this surely reflects a more realistic relationship with the world of work than one where universities maintain control of a recognition and award system and fail to fully engage with work as an equal partner.

Methodology and case study inferences

I have used an explanatory case study that has tried to make retrospective sense of phenomena that took place over a sustained period of three years, and where behaviours "could not be manipulated' (Yin, 2002:7), although I was able to have some influence[52]. I have presented a rich picture of events and contextual conditions pertaining to the development of work based learning understandings and practices in the partnership, and have critically analysed and evaluated these and the DEWBLAM project outcomes in frameworks of European politics and protocols, and of current educational thinking. I used a range of methods – mainly textual analysis, questionnaires, observational memory (trying to remain unbiased), and literature reviews as benchmarks. In chapter two, I tested the case study data against action research indicators for reliability and validity and have

[51] See appendix 17 for Diploma participant evaluations

[52] See figure 3 in chapter 2

further tested the knowledge that emerged from the project against a body of published work throughout this doctoral project. An additional measure of construct validity using multiple sources and participants comes from the collaborative development of the common work based learning platform and the pilot programmes which are currently being tested and implemented in individual contexts.

As an ethnographic researcher, I have been able to participate in the case study in a deep way, reviewing events with a more objective eye now that the project has concluded and seen both where I have been successful in my role, and where I could perhaps have been more proactive in fore-grounding issues or in leading as the partners sometimes struggled with new epistemologies. Making sense of the DEWBLAM project and my inter-connectivity to it has been an illuminating process but if I had the opportunity to start this project again, I would purposely design it using an action research approach, as it would fully engage all participants, enable initial detailed and participative planning, provide a platform for articulating emerging knowledge, and might produce an even richer picture than it already did.

The quality of this case study can be measured against the four tests detailed by Yin, (2002:35):

- **construct validity**: a) evidence has been drawn from multiple sources e.g.: collaboratively-written definitions, previous experiences, feedback sheets, questionnaires; b) peer reviews of parts of this doctoral project selected for publication; c) ongoing partner applications and testing of the platform
- **internal validity**: explanations have been made throughout this project and evaluated against current educational theories and practices, political protocols, and contexts
- **external validity**: the findings can be applied in other situations (see below), but there was no hypothesis at the outset
- **reliability**: if another researcher were to conduct the same case study, they would have access to the same data but would not necessarily be an insider researcher with similar personal knowledge and experiences to draw on, and may, therefore, not draw similar conclusions. This would indicate that the case study fails the test of reliability; however, as the platform and pilots would still have been developed, the study still partially meets this test

What inferences can be drawn from this single case study that might be applicable to other studies? Firstly, as a research strategy, the single case study helped to explain causal links to processes and products and considered their impact, but it is advisable for future studies to plan and design at the outset, rather than trying to make retrospective sense. Multiple cluster studies of the single partner contexts and the central focus would have produced a very rich picture indeed, but this was not a realistic proposition in the confines of this doctoral project – and the DEWBLAM project has now ended.

Secondly, selection of partners was entirely random, based on a series of personal contacts and political decisions to geographically balance the partnership according to

EU criteria that prefer to fund projects with a strong southern European presence and that also include eastern and northern Europe. Given these premises, it might be easier for future partnerships to commence from a more equitable baseline, such as selecting a common discipline, or involving academic and work based practitioners with similar levels of knowledge and practice who are able to contribute consistently over a sustained period of time, rather than the eclectic mix and changing partner representatives DEWBLAM had.

Thirdly, the *results* of the DEWBLAM project are significant, initiating and launching work based learning discourses across Europe and piloting programmes that are innovative in their contexts and that can be evaluated, built on in the future, and applied in other situations.

Major doctoral project outcomes

To my knowledge, no similar attempt has been made that so clearly seeks to define pan-European work based learning methodologies and practices that are potentially applicable across Europe. In chapter two, I identified in my research question that I would "inquire into the process of developing a common European work based learning platform". My objectives were to:

- frame the project within a postmodern meta-narrative
- analyse the complexity, issues, and tensions of the DEWBLAM partnership
- analyse the processes of collaborative knowledge generation
- contribute to current understandings of the polarity of academic and work based knowledge and learning

In chapter one, in order to contextualise the DEWBLAM project and its aims, I introduced macro-political European protocols and frameworks - particularly the Bologna Process that seeks to establish comparability and flexible learning pathways in higher education - and detailed the origins of the European partnership and its constituent members. I also presented my credentials for this doctoral project, relating it to my doctoral programme, and to previous professional practice showing how this enabled me to found the DEWBLAM project.

In chapter three, I analysed the DEWBLAM ecology from an epistemological perspective, situating it within a modern/postmodern dichotomy as the project collided with and challenged espoused traditionalist academic views of higher education. I related how the DEWBLAM partnership needed firstly to learn a new language, or meta-narrative, and to establish a positive learning environment - extending the "Ba" concept - in order to develop the common European work based learning platform and pilot programmes. I critiqued the DEWBLAM architecture, proposing a more coherent structure that would have facilitated more effective knowledge sharing.

In chapter four, I identified the tensions and complexities of the partnership and analysed the processes of how work based learning understandings and practices were collaboratively grown, including my role in facilitating knowledge creation that drew on my previous experiences with the SME managers. I then critically analysed the major product – the common European work based learning platform – measuring the definitions and distinctive features against a background of current European and UK debates and understandings on work based learning and vocational competency, and calling for advanced practitioners to engage more with European peers in order to maintain a more open interpretation of work based learning.

I contributed to understandings of the competence/knowledge dichotomy in chapter five, looking through the lens of mode 1 science or mode 2 knowledge production propositions and considering the part that work based programmes might play in resolving some of the polarities between organisations and universities. I proposed mutuality in knowledge generation, argued against knowledge transfers, and developed the concept of *competent knowledge*[53] that proposed the meshing of codified and tacit knowledge acquired at work and in higher education institutions with competence acquired in practice. I then analysed the relationship of universities and the work place and suggested new ways in which there might be mutual engagement, such as co-locating new professionals or *academic work practitioners*, universities acting as central knowledge banks or providing "ba" or "agora" [54] for open free-flowing knowledge reviews and debates (Nowotny et al, 2004), and I also advocated closer collaboration in developing real-world programmes through collective knowledge domains.

In this final chapter, I have drawn all the disparate project parts together and reflected on the process, the outcomes, and the contributions to knowledge and practice that have been made during this project, proposing some future actions. I have analysed here the impact of DEWBLAM on the partner institutions and their local economies. I have also considered the implications for the European knowledge and learning economy, and have highlighted that there is now a growing community of European work based practitioners – where three years ago there was none.

Achievements and DProf level 5 descriptors

I have engaged in advanced learning in this doctoral project through self-managed research and collaborative activity that has achieved major organisational change in the partner institutions through the conceptualisation of work based learning theories and practices, grounded in European frameworks and understandings, and through the implementation of pilot programmes.

As a work based learning academic and developer, I have achieved excellence in work based learning practice by:

- developing the common work based learning platform in a collaborative partnership

[53] See also section on contribution to knowledge above

[54] A public open space used for assemblies or markets in Ancient Greece – definition: Oxford dictionary

- creating a new European community of work based practice
- introducing the National Centre for Work Based Learning Partnerships to new work based practices enabling the development of a new doctoral award via an APEL pathway
- engaging with SME managers in workshops where I developed the concept of *competent knowledge*, meshed collective existing work based and theoretical knowledge into new situated knowledge, thereby enhancing both their practices and the academic/organisational knowledge bases
- deepening my own work based practice through this research and through the development of my accredited management Diploma
- introducing Middlesex University to the European dimension of protocols with which it must rapidly engage in order to comply with the implementation of the Bologna Process by 2010

The table in figure 14 below maps my learning to the DProf level descriptors in order to clearly contextualise my achievements.

Figure 14 – Achievements and Level 5 Descriptors

Cognitive	
Knowledge:	I have acquired depth of knowledge of an inter-disciplinary nature in the complex and highly contested area of work based learning concepts and practices within the diverse European arena, and within the SME sector, and am pushing at the boundaries of current theoretical understandings and practices within the HE sector, proposing new partnerships with industry that transcend boundaries; whilst concomitantly arguing for recognition of applied work based knowledge within a competence framework as *competent knowledge*.
Analysis:	I have dealt with the complexity of the existing knowledge base at European level, analysing it and identifying lacunae, and have facilitated knowledge creation and made sense of contributions in order to produce the common platform.
Synthesis:	I have autonomously synthesised information and ideas emerging both from the diverse experiences and understandings of the European partners and from facilitating knowledge creation with the SME managers, expanding and adding a new dimension to existing understandings of work based learning and of management.
Evaluation:	I have independently argued for alternative approaches to current HE engagement with organisational knowledge by evaluated current theories and practices against my own findings and proposing improvements in practice.
Transferable skills	

Self appraisal/ reflection on practice:	I have worked with critical communities of European higher education institutions with whom a new European paradigm and a new community of work based learning practice has been established; and with critical communities of SME managers with whom modified paradigms of management theory and practice have been established. I have reflected on my own and on others' practice, critiquing this in order to learn and to improve future practice.
Planning/ management of learning:	I initiated the European partnership and the SME programmes and was responsible for the UK DEWBLAM budget and outcomes, and I autonomously planned and managed my own learning as I have highlighted throughout. The political implications of this case study are potentially significant as wbl concepts and practices begin to impact on partners' learning and on local/regional contexts, and as there is further engagement with European discourses on lifelong learning.
Problem solving:	As an autonomous practitioner and as a Middlesex representative, I have dealt with problems of gaining European funding and of establishing and managing complex partnerships and projects.
Communication/ presentation	I have engaged in full professional and academic communication with the European partners, with the SME managers, and with Middlesex colleagues; I have given papers, presentations, and seminars in the UK and in Europe to both critical communities and to institutional executives for developmental and informative purposes.
Research capability	I have independently researched this project and produced two papers for publication this year, have justified why I selected case study as my research method, and have evaluated the objectivity, reliability and validity required to conduct this study, mapping the data to action research indicators for additional testing.
Operational context	
Context	This project has operated within a highly complex, unpredictable and specialised work context – bringing work based learning into a pan-European arena. This has demanded innovative and interdisciplinary approaches to exploring current limits of knowledge, understandings, and practices of work based learning in Europe, in a partnership that began almost from a zero baseline and has now developed into a community of practice
Responsibility	Within the bounds of professional practice, I have operated autonomously as a self-employed consultant within the SME sector and have also acted as the DEWBLAM Middlesex University representative and leader, with a high level of responsibility to achieve all projected outcomes.
Ethical understanding	I have demonstrated my understanding of ethics within this research project and have considered its potential impact on professional practices and wider contexts; I have also formulated solutions in

	dialogue with superiors, peers, and clients in order to achieve common aims.

Personal Reflection

I have tried to analyse objectively the processes and outcomes of this project but it has not always been easy, particularly in recognising that my personal style of collaboration and leadership could have been more participative, and better communicated. One of the difficulties lay in the fact that leadership was initially divided between myself as the founder and scientific advisor, as well as the project coordinator. Whilst this duality functioned reasonably well at the project beginning, as I let go of control and allowed the partnership to follow its own dynamic, the central coordination lacked the immediate experience or time to cohere the partnership into a functioning entity (see chapter three). I was severely critiqued and contested and have learnt through this that I need to make a much clearer case for myself and to improve my communications, negotiation, and leadership skills, defining and agreeing roles and tasks at the outset, leading from the front when necessary, and spending more time on social aspects of collaboration.

Researching and writing this case study retrospectively has also increased my awareness of the richness and complexity of the DEWBLAM project – had we consciously designed this with an action research methodology, then we may have produced earlier data and more compelling cases that might have influenced the easier implementation of work based learning pilots. As new wbl knowledge domains were created, these could have been mapped, giving a much more complete picture of the single realities and producing knowledge flows and greater links with other pockets of work based learning practices that are slowly beginning to emerge across Europe within higher education and industry.

I fundamentally disagree with many of the platform definitions, finding them too narrowly conceived as competences related to specific jobs and am also uneasy with the continuing low profile of work based knowledge that lacks status and requires validation by universities (see chapter four). I still prefer the definition of work based learning I used at the beginning of this doctoral project - "learning at, through, and for work" - as it recognises the independence and validity of work loci. Nonetheless, I have developed my own understanding of work based learning and can envisage enhanced practices here in my own institution that can elicit and build on work competences and that transcend work/university barriers to develop new knowledge domains (see chapter five). Whilst these differences in understanding demonstrate that there has been sufficient growth for autonomy to occur within the partnership, concomitantly it is disconcerting that the definitions have emerged from a narrow base of partial understanding and of very little experience in work based learning, although they fit into current European paradigms of lifelong learning and the Bologna Process.

There is always a sense in the national psyche that the UK stands outside Europe, and as a result of this research, I have realised that we often have insufficient contact and

information here related to what is really happening at EU levels. This urgently needs to change, and I intend to ensure that Middlesex University becomes better informed and more connected to the European dimension.

Despite the problems of the DEWBLAM project, I can say with pride that I have made a major contribution to bringing work based learning into Europe, and to enabling the development of a European community of practice that can continue to grow in understanding and practice, and that I am beginning to bring European discourses into the Middlesex work based practice.

Public recognition

As a result of the DEWBLAM and doctoral project, my professional practice is being recognised in the European arena, often receiving invitations to lecture and to speak as an expert at conferences and seminars organised by HE or research institutions in the UK, the Czech Republic, Germany, and Switzerland. Additionally, in 2005, the DEWBLAM project partner in Germany was awarded a national prize for innovation by the German institute for career development[55] at a ceremony that I was invited to attend.

From the research conducted and originally written for this doctoral project, I have extracted the following papers and chapters for publication:

1. *Work Based Learning in the SME Context* describes the accredited management Diploma for SMEs developed as a partner in the DEWBLAM project and explores issues of pedagogy and of work/practice based knowledge (see appendix 15). This was given at the final DEWBLAM conference in November, 2006, published in the conference proceedings, and is forthcoming in the Middlesex University book: *WBL – Journeys to the Core of Higher Education* (MU Press, December 2007)
2. *Creating and Validating Knowledge at Work* analyses the SME management programmes and, using these as an example, argues that universities need to find new ways of engaging with the world of work, shifting from the role of knowledge transferors to that of brokers or partners in a reciprocal process of knowledge creation and recognition (see appendix 16). This is included in the final DEWBLAM report for the European Commission.

3. *The Dynamics of Professional Learning in the SME Sector* analyses the context and dynamics of learning that professional practitioners engaged in during their participation in the management programme workshops, and critically examines the tensions and issues of academic/professional learning and of knowledge validation (see appendix 17). This paper was given at the symposium on research methodologies at Middlesex University, in January 2007.

[55] BIBB - Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung

4. *The Quiet Revolution – Growing Work Based Learning in Europe*[56] – presents the DEWBLAM story in brief, focusing critically on the context, the processes of creating a common work based platform, issues of partnerships and of work/academic knowledge, and on the impact that the project might have on local economies (see appendix 18). This was published in the final report for the European Commission, extracts were given at the UALL WBL annual conference in July 2007, and will be published as a chapter in the forthcoming book (December, 2007) by the Middlesex Centre for Excellence in Work Based Learning: *WBL – Journeys to the Core of Higher Education.*

Conclusion

In 2001 when I first had the idea of introducing work based learning practices in higher education into Europe, it appeared that there were no wbl practitioners and no communities of practice, apart from in France and the UK – indeed the term "work based learning" amongst the partners was virtually unknown. Today, due to the DEWBLAM project, there are an increasing number of work based programmes and practitioners in the partner countries, and both theoretical understandings of work based learning and their possible applications in adult educational programmes are growing and spreading throughout the academy and beyond to local and national policy makers, to employers' organisations, and to industry. This has not, however, been an easy process, as old and new epistemologies have confronted each other on individual, institutional, and occasionally political levels, representing in certain instances a modern/postmodern dichotomy.

Several years after they commenced, DEWBLAM and this doctoral project end here. I have engaged and grappled with new concepts and new methodological approaches to knowledge and learning emerging from the European dimension, and have referenced the common European work based learning platform within this framework. I have encountered the continuing imbalance between work and universities concerning claims to knowledge, and suggest that both sites need to break down borders and engage more fully within joint knowledge domains in order to create knowledge that is meaningful, publicly valid, and utilisable.

All endings contain new beginnings - I continue to raise the profile of European discourses and protocols at Middlesex University, beginning to reference our work based learning practices within the European dimension as the UK moves closer to implementing the Bologna Process. I have gained valuable insights into my own practice, and have also enhanced my personal professional standing, sharing my new expertise in local, national and international forums through publications, conferences and development projects.

[56] This chapter forms the basis of my re-write of this doctoral project

Finally, as I complete writing this doctoral project and have critically reflected on the DEWBLAM project shortcomings, I can also envisage its successes as the initial work based learning practices and pilots are rolled out into an ever-widening arena.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To begin to implement European protocols into work based learning programmes, commencing with the mapping of the European Credit Accumulation System (ECAS) onto the generic level descriptors and learning outcomes, and onto programme requirements, paying particular attention to credit volume and learning hours.

2. Members of the new Institute for Work Based Learning at Middlesex University should join national and European working policy-groups, in order to make major contributions to new developments in higher education highlighted throughout this project, thereby attenuating risks of partial interpretations of work based learning theories and practices made by people operating from bases of little experience. Specific groups recommended include the Bologna Follow-up Group,

the Professional Doctorate group, and working groups within the European Universities Association and the QCA focusing on developing wbl and APEL.

3. To recognise high level learning and knowledge and validate these through full APEL undergraduate and postgraduate awards, based on the French model and the DPROF by Public Works.

4. To build on European partnership links and develop new business in Europe as expert consultants in work based learning.

5. To engage more with employers, developing partnerships that affirm and enhance existing organisational knowledge, and that can mesh with academic knowledge to produce organisationally and academically relevant programmes

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